

# ALWAYS LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE OF LIFE

THE AIDEX '91 STORY

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## ALWAYS LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE OF LIFE: THE AIDEX '91 STORY

Iain McIntyre

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Dedicated to Toto.

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"I've never seen such bravery. I served in WWII and I saw action. I've never seen anything like those young people sitting down on Sunday in front of those police, some of whom had their batons out and were saying things like 'Let me go and get them.'"

**Bill Massey, *Socialist Worker*, 1991.**

"You never knew what was going to happen, it was like a huge beast with mood swings."

**Jules, Radio 3CR, December 2007.**

"The big thing for me was that we did stop it. After Hawke and Keating the Left had had so many losses. This wasn't a pyrrhic victory, but it actually stopped the event for 17 years because they knew that they were going to be driven nuts. Other things like the MUA, you sort of won, you sort of lost, but this was a straight up victory, no two ways about it."

**Colm McNaughton, Radio 3CR, December 2007**



# INTRODUCTION

**AIDEX '91** was a defining moment for a generation of Australian activists and troublemakers, and it was one of those rare moments that delivered a shock to the system (both theirs and ours). Over a week or so in late November 1991 up to 2000 protesters descended on Canberra to blockade the National Exhibition (NATEX) site in hopes of closing down the Australian International Defence Equipment Exhibition (AIDEX) arms fair. In a foretaste of the anti-globalisation protests to come, the campaign brought together people from a myriad of political causes and countercultural scenes and gave them a clear goal and the numbers and determination to meet it.

In the build up to the protests the ACT government declared it would not allow AIDEX '93 to take place at the NATEX site due to lobbying and national protests which saw the number of exhibitors fall from over 200 in 1989 to 140 in 1991. Despite ever-increasing levels of police repression, internal conflict and media vilification the AIDEX '91 demonstration itself further disrupted the event to such a degree that no other city in Australia would host an arms bazaar on the same scale for 17 years.

I attended AIDEX '91. As was typical of many other protestors in their late teens and early twenties, my primary focus was on environmental issues, particularly those relating to old growth logging and rainforests. For about

four years I'd been involved in environmental and anti-racist groups in Western Australia that were engaged in direct action and which used consensus decision-making processes. I identified as an anarchist and had taken part in a range of activities from leafleting Bunnings stores and performing guerilla street theatre pranks to taking part in Land Rights pickets and blockading rainforest imports. I was reasonably well versed in the then interminable debates over the validity and usefulness of non-violent direct action (NVDA), deep ecology, vegetarianism and a whole host of other theories and lifestyle choices. For the most part however, I wanted, to paraphrase the old-time Wobblies, action and plenty of it.

However despite our best efforts and the existence of a fairly unified, but small, West Australian activist scene, there was not a huge amount of action on offer at the time. Like many others I had been horrified and angry at the recent Gulf War, but Perth, a conservative city, had seen some of the smallest demonstrations in the country. We'd responded with vigils, peace concerts, satirical posters and other efforts, but we were left fairly gutted at our inability to do much about the first war Australia had formally taken part in since Vietnam. I'd heard some crazy stories about the AIDEX '89 protest from friends who'd been there, so when the call went out for people to join in a major blockade to halt the event in '91, I leapt at the chance to get one back at the warmongers.

I traveled to AIDEX '91 on my own with the plan of hooking up with friends when I got there. It was my first time outside of parochial W.A. and the trip certainly opened my eyes to what the rest of the world had to offer. I caught a plane to Sydney and then a bus to Canberra, which by chance got held up by a protest march from Parliament to NATEX. Hopping off the bus, I embarked on one of the more intense weeks of my life, one which would play a big role in cementing my ideas around the possibilities of mass defiance and the media and State's reaction to it.

Unlike many at AIDEX '91, I wasn't particularly shocked at the escalating police violence that was meted out in response to our successful blockade of the fair. Similarly, the media's demonisation of our efforts seemed par for the course, although I was surprised at the number of so called "alternative" types I later met who had swallowed its line. Luckily I didn't get too hurt during the protest, beyond a trashed pair of glasses and a few bruises, although many of my friends did not come off so lightly. One had a dreadlock ripped out of his head and another had her head slammed into the tarmac. Although the direction of the blockade was often reactive and I didn't know what was going on half the time, I did get the sense that we were winning and after so many defeats in my short activist career that certainly felt good.

Although the violence and chaos of AIDEX '91 burnt out a lot of protesters, I was one of those who took its success as a reason to carry on. In the coming months I visited various activist offices and spaces, took part in a dreadfully ineffective anti-woodchipping action in the Gippsland, attended the New Years Earth First! gathering and then joined many others from AIDEX at the rowdy Melbourne protest against US President George Bush (the first one) before going on to have many other varied adventures.

Since the mid 1990s, I've increasingly devoted much of my time to documenting and taking part in activities celebrating the radical past, in part

because I find it nerdily fascinating, and in part because the rapid generational turnover of Australia's activist scene leads to important knowledge being continually lost and struggles quickly forgotten. I now see AIDEX '91 as taking place during the peak of a particular Australian "cycle of protest" that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Whilst scholars of social movements expend a lot of energy in trying to quantify, measure and explain such cycles it is relatively evident that all campaigns, movements and scenes experience peaks and troughs in terms of their strength and effectiveness. At the peak of the cycle activists are kicking arse and taking names, but as repression, burn out and division set in the numbers drift away and the hard core sit about despairing (or if they're far sighted enough begin preparing for the next upswing). Each cycle differs from the last and many may coincide at once across different social movements, but short of a major revolutionary break with all that has come before us, the general pattern seems likely to continue. All things must pass and all that. The fact that movements come and go is not a reason to despair however, but rather a reason to make us think about the long term picture and remember our successes during quieter times.

I had originally intended to produce something about AIDEX '91 in time for the 2000 S11 protests as I saw many potential parallels between the two events and felt that a re-exploration could help play a part in informing recurring debates over organizational tactics and strategies. As it was, one thing or another got in the way and whilst I did some interviews for Radio 3CR and posted some recollections to Indymedia, the proposed pamphlet never eventuated and S11 went off just fine without my historical contribution.

Nevertheless the idea of producing a largely oral history of the AIDEX protests remained on the backburner. With the news that Adelaide was to host the first AIDEX style event in 17 years on Remembrance Day 2008 I decided it was now or never, and after months of hurried research and activity here we are. During the final week of completing the book the organisers of the Asia Pacific Defence Exhibition (APDSE) announced that they were canceling the event, in large part due to the threat of protest disruption, making the AIDEX '91 story more relevant than ever. Over the next 140 or so pages you'll find a variety of voices telling the story of the protests and giving their opinions on what, where, why and how it all happened. AIDEX '91 naturally enough did not occur in a vacuum, and the first section of the book provides some detail on the background factors which motivated people to attend as well as on the political context in which it took place. This section of the book also recalls the AIDEX '89 protest and the flurry of organising activities that occurred in the run up to '91. An account of the protest itself then follows. The final section focuses on the aftermath of the event and its effects on both Australian social movements and the arms industry.

Unlike many of the accounts that appeared in the activist media and elsewhere following AIDEX '91, this history will not focus primarily on issues of appropriate protester behaviour and its relation to the high level of police violence that occurred. Instead the book will attempt to tell the story of the campaign from a non-partisan standpoint that views a variety of tactics, strategies and groups as all contributing to the eventual success of the protest. Other events that took place around Canberra will receive some coverage, but my main interest is in

what led up to and occurred during the blockade of the NATEX site.

In compiling this history I've drawn on a number of sources including alternative and mainstream media accounts and radio and film documentaries. I've also carried out a number of interviews with people who were members of groups or tendencies that I feel have not been adequately canvassed elsewhere. In tracing the order of events that took place on the ground I am heavily indebted to the *Piecing It Together: Hearing The Stories Of AIDEX '91* publication. For those who just cannot get enough of AIDEX '91, I urge you to seek out a copy for yourself. As part of a series of ecumenical hearings designed to "bring about healing in the community and contribute positively to clarifying what took place", the 474-page document was originally published in 1995. Whilst skewed towards NVDA perspectives and largely missing the voices of the more militant members of the blockade (no doubt because those tendencies failed to respond to or take part in the hearings), *Piecing It Together* provides far more detail on the media coverage, Ombudsman's inquiries and community policing than has been possible here.



# THE BACKGROUND TO AIDEX '91





Street theatre at AIDEX '89 (Jules McLellan)

## THE ARMS INDUSTRY MAKES A COMEBACK

The AIDEX protests took place during a time of deep structural change in Australia as state and Federal governments embraced economic rationalist (now known as neo-liberal) thinking in regards to social and economic policy. Amongst other things, these policies saw the privatisation of government owned companies and resources, the deregulation of the banking sector, the trade off of wages and job security for “productivity” (i.e.-working harder) and the removal of protective tariffs for industry. Business had long insisted on the right to make decisions unimpeded by the views of others. With the election of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 1983, it increasingly got its way.<sup>1</sup> Despite the nation facing no external threats, the Federal ALP government, in line with the Cooksey report of 1986, increased domestic spending on the military to the point where it consumed \$8 billion a year or \$24 million a day (not including industry subsidies and military aid to foreign countries) by 1991.<sup>2</sup> This represented 9.3% of the federal budget, out-stripping spending on education (7.5%) and running a close second to health (11%)<sup>3</sup>. Although the Australian government remained the largest arms producer in the country, new government controlled companies were formed, such as Australian Defence Industries Ltd (ADI) and Aerospace Technologies Australia, in order to make their businesses more commercial and internationally competitive.<sup>4</sup>

In an attempt to offset the costs of increasing weapons imports, and to help overwrite the expansion of the arms industry for domestic production, the Hawke government aimed to double military exports through measures including tax breaks of 150% for Research and Development and a shortened assessment period for export approvals.<sup>5</sup> The government further eased controls on military exports in June 1989 by reducing the number of grounds on which applications could be rejected, by placing the onus of proof onto the opponents of sales and by undermining the ability of the Department of Foreign Affairs to act as a watchdog<sup>6</sup>.

In many ways the Australian government had chosen exactly the wrong time to be entering the arms market. Global sales were down with the end of the Cold War, the USSR and USA were cutting military spending and flogging off their leftovers at bargain prices, and Australian manufacturers were finding it hard to compete with the lower production costs of their competitors in South Korea, Brazil and China.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless the ALP forged ahead building up the Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) to become the country's second largest research organization with an annual budget of \$200 million.<sup>8</sup> It also began endorsing and investing in events such as AIDEX.<sup>9</sup>

Although Australia's exports only comprised \$115 million<sup>10</sup> of the annual \$31.8 billion arms export trade in 1989-90,<sup>11</sup> the push towards expansion nevertheless provoked opposition on a number of grounds. The primary objection amongst the peace movement remained that Australia should be doing all it could to oppose the repression, death and destruction that weapons were designed to wreak. Whilst the arms industry argued at length that the majority of Australian sales were of a “non-lethal”, nature it was nevertheless true that no military force could hope to operate without items such as boots, spare parts and guidance systems.

Despite ALP claims to the contrary, peace activists argued that increased exports were part of a push to not only militarise Australian society (as seen in the increase in recruiting advertisements, military sponsorships and a focus on ANZAC Day as a national ritual), but also neighbouring countries in the region. Whilst arms sales were generally on the decrease around the world, the Asia-Pacific region saw a 400% increase from 1977-87.<sup>12</sup> An increase in Australian military aid, often through the gift of weapons, during the 1980s to countries like Thailand (up from \$600 000 in 1981 to over \$5 million in 1985) and Fiji did little to curb the role of the military in those societies.<sup>13</sup> In the case of the Solomon Islands, the provision of arms and patrol boats to the government during this period arguably increased existing ethnic tensions, and the civil war and coup of 2000 saw the weapons used by all sides.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Mirage fighters offloaded to Pakistan in 1990 added to tensions with India and are believed to have been used later in the testing of nuclear capable cruise missiles.<sup>15</sup>

Many in the peace movement also objected to Australia increasing its part in a worldwide military project which saw governments expending around \$1000 billion a year on arming, developing and maintaining their military forces. With the World Bank estimating that at least 20% of Third World debt was due to military spending, the effect of military spending on poverty and health was fairly evident. Beyond this, critics also pointed to the distorting effect of arms investment on Australia's own economy with every dollar invested in arms manufacture estimated to create half the jobs that could be generated elsewhere.<sup>16</sup>

Arms exports were also seen as compromising Australia's foreign policy due to the fear of offending valuable customers. Certainly Australia's credibility in advocating disarmament for countries such as Cambodia was undermined by the fact that it was doing its best to flog weapons everywhere else.<sup>17</sup>

Another key criticism of the Australian arms industry was that it was involved in arming dictatorial regimes against their own people. Defence Minister Robert Ray's contention before the Senate in February 1991 that, "We do not have a history of exporting weapons that can be used in countries that have gross human rights abuses",<sup>18</sup> was far from convincing. Facing the Press Council later that month, he changed his tune. In response to revelations that he had approved sales of spare parts to the Iraqi Air Force only three years after that same Air Force had deployed chemical weapons against Kurdish villagers, he stated: "I've never said we come with totally clean hands"<sup>19</sup>. Foreign Minister Gareth Evans came to Ray's aid at the time, lamely claiming that the \$850 million dollars worth of exports (which were eventually scrapped due to the invasion of Kuwait) were only for training purposes.<sup>20</sup> The two later clashed however when the Defence Minister refused to confirm or deny that he had approved continued exports to Myanmar despite Evans calling for an international embargo on weapons sales in the wake of that country's punishing military campaign against student dissenters and the Karen minority.<sup>21</sup>

Plenty of other examples of the increasing laxity of Australian export controls could be found in the late 1980s; the government approved sales to such flagrant human rights abusers as Indonesia, Somalia, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.<sup>22</sup> As the Department of Defence was no longer required to disclose details of exports it did not consider "sensitive" the public, oversight of sales to



such regimes had been seriously weakened.<sup>23</sup> Despite the government reviewing and issuing new arms sales guidelines in March 1992,<sup>24</sup> this problem has only been exacerbated in the years since due the rise of corporatisation and the use of “commercial confidentiality” clauses.

## NEW WARS AND OLD CONFLICTS

As the Cold War ended the prospects for world peace in the late 1980s seem promising to many. The US and its European allies made tentative steps towards disarmament, in line with Soviet efforts to end the costly arms race which had crippled its economy. Nonetheless, there were ominous signs that peace was not to be. With President George Bush Senior trumpeting the New World Order and “the end of ideology,” and as capitalism triumphed across the globe, a number of new conflicts quickly came to join the old in generating misery and profit. Whilst the end of state communism had seen sections of the Australian Left fall into disarray, a series of events in 1990 and 1991 were to focus the attention of Australian society at large, bringing those who had participated in peace rallies during the 1970s and 1980s, as well as a new generation, into the streets.

Following long standing territorial disputes that go back to the Imperial carve up of the Middle East following World War Two, Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2 1990. Although the Iraqi regime was later to claim that the US had given its tacit approval to the invasion, as evidenced by US ambassador April Glaspie’s statement to Saddam Hussein that “We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait”<sup>25</sup>, the world’s sole remaining superpower quickly turned on its former ally.

The UN passed a series of resolutions condemning the invasion, imposing economic sanctions and authorizing the use of force should Iraq not withdraw by January 15 1991. The US then rushed over half a million military personnel to the Gulf.<sup>26</sup> With the clock running down the US also assembled a coalition of 34 nations and threatened and punished those, like Yemen, who refused to join.<sup>27</sup>

Following the expiration of the deadline, a massive 38-day aerial bombing campaign began, in which over 100 000 sorties destroyed Iraq’s military and civilian infrastructure. A 100-hour ground war then pushed the largely conscripted Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. Whilst US led forces slaughtered retreating Iraqi troops, in a move described by soldiers as a “turkey shoot”<sup>28</sup>, they failed to take action against the Republican Guards as the latter brutally suppressed a rebellion across Iraq that President Bush had called for via Voice of America radio transmissions.<sup>29</sup> Media coverage of the plight of the Kurds in Northern Iraq saw the US belatedly rush in humanitarian aid to the Kurdish North and enforce a series of no-fly zones across the country.<sup>30</sup> However, lack of support for the largely Shia dominated uprisings across the rest of the country saw the Iraqi Left decimated; it effectively handed control of the resistance to the Islamic groups who would lead the opposition to US occupation from 2003.

By the end of the Gulf War, up to 200 000 Iraqi military personnel had been killed alongside thousands of civilians. The Iraqi economy and infrastructure was in tatters. Electricity production was reduced to four percent of its pre-

war capacity and the health, transport, telecommunications and sewage system had been destroyed along with dams, port facilities, oil refineries, railroads and bridges.<sup>31</sup> In achieving these ends the US alone had spent an estimated \$61 billion.<sup>32</sup>

Continuing sanctions, the radioactive fallout from the American use of depleted uranium in armaments, and a series of bombing raids that outstripped the number originally carried out in Operation Desert Storm resulted in the death of around one million Iraqis, mainly children, in just the first eight years following the war.<sup>33</sup> Whilst militarily crippled, the sanctions and continued world hostility would ironically strengthen Sadaam Hussein's hand against his own people who in their suffering were in no position to resist.<sup>34</sup>

Protest reaction around the world was swift and huge, but ultimately unable to exert much influence on the war. In Australia, tens of thousands of protestors marched against the beginning of the air war in Melbourne and Sydney, and protestors turned out in significant numbers around the rest of the country.<sup>35</sup> Regular vigils, peace camps and smaller protests at American embassies and companies also occurred throughout the period.

There were many varied domestic objections to the first shooting war Australian forces had taken part in over a decade. Some in the peace movement called for more time for sanctions to take effect whilst others opposed all military activity on principle. Many, rallying around the slogan "No Blood For Oil", pointed to the hypocrisy of PM Hawke claiming, "Big countries cannot invade little countries and get away with it"<sup>36</sup>, when his government continued to take no action over the occupation of East Timor. Others claimed that the Arab states needed to find their own solutions and were concerned that Australia, in being the first country in the world to commit to the US coalition, was acting as a client state of the US. Whilst the majority of protestors focused on Australia's decision to send a Naval Task Force, medical teams and a naval clearance diving team<sup>37</sup> to the Gulf, others pointed to the far more destructive role that domestic US bases were playing in conducting spying and targeting bombing runs.

In terms of the arms trade, the anti-Gulf War protests focused attention on the US's, and to a lesser degree Australia's, role in arming Iraq in the years prior to the invasion of Kuwait. Similarly, the ALP's push to expand Australia's own armaments spending and offensive capabilities could now be seen in the light of the military's integration into US operations. Whilst the opposition to the war quickly melted away as the bombing offensive took place, the protests had nevertheless mobilized many of those who would turn out against AIDEX '91.

Another issue which had captured public attention around the time of AIDEX was the 1990 declaration of independence from Papua New Guinea by Bougainvillian rebels following decades of environmental destruction wreaked by Australian mining giant CRA's Panguna copper mine.<sup>38</sup> Concerns about the direction of Australian foreign policy were increased by the fact that Australian military training, aid (which outstripped PNG's own spending) and equipment had facilitated failed attempts to recapture the Island and a subsequent blockade of its food and medical supplies.<sup>39</sup>

Australians had also long been sympathetic to the plight of the East Timorese, due in no small part to the long running efforts of those involved in

solidarity and support campaigns. Connections forged during World War Two also played into the mix as did horror at the (at that time still denied) murder of five Australian journalists by Indonesian soldiers at Balibo. By the late 1980s an estimated 200 000 Timorese had been killed following the occupation of the country by Indonesia,<sup>40</sup> but interest in the issue had waxed and waned since the 1975 invasion. This was to change dramatically with the killing of up to 400 protesters in the Timorese capital Dili in November 1991.<sup>41</sup> With footage of the slaughter broadcast around the world, condemnation of the Indonesian military's action was swift. The Australian government condemned the massacre and called for a full, genuine and open inquiry.<sup>42</sup>

Critics of Australia's appeasement of Indonesia were quick to point out however that the Australian government had long provided military training and materiel to Indonesia, a point which energized and focused the minds of many attending the AIDEX protest. In the weeks leading up to and after AIDEX protests and actions against the occupation of East Timor took place around Australia. In Canberra itself the ACT Trades and Labour Council (TLC) placed a black ban on the Indonesian embassy and endorsed a picket staffed by East Timorese and their supporters who also set up a "cemetery" and a protest embassy outside its gates.<sup>43</sup>

## THE RETURN OF DIRECT ACTION

During the 1970s and early 1980s Australian activists pioneered, during a series of forest blockades at locations such as Terania Creek and the Daintree, a number of direct action tactics and strategies which would later be adopted by the global environment movement.<sup>44</sup> From the mid 1980s however, the larger green organizations began to steer away from mass protests and direct action in favour of accepting donations from the business sector and lobbying politicians, and of serving on government committees. During the 1987 Federal election, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and The Wilderness Society (TWS) took the unprecedented step of endorsing the ALP at the 1987 election, The ACF also allowed the Labor Secretariat to decide which marginal seats their campaign resources would be directed to.<sup>45</sup>

Whilst a number of organizations, such as Friends of the Earth (FOE)<sup>46</sup>, opted to stay outside of the ALP's orbit, the incorporation of the larger organizations into the Federal and State policy making process sapped the movement of much of its vitality and ultimately weakened its ability to create the changes it sought. Energies previously put into building of a broad based mass movement were now dedicated to insider politicking and deal making as the elite of professional green lobbyists came to dominate the public face and overall direction of environmental activism. Submission writing and political horse-trading were unlikely to excite anyone outside of this leadership whose increasing integration into government circles gave many the impression that the battle for the environment was over.

This process of incorporation was also taking place within Feminist, Aboriginal, Labour and other social movements; many of those in positions of leadership essentially signing "peace deals" with the ALP in return for a seat at the decision making table. Whilst their initial aim had been to change the

character of the government, the reverse was largely true as the ALP set the boundaries of what was possible.<sup>47</sup> Former radicals and continuing members of the Communist parties soon foreswore challenging the basis of the profit-driven economy in favour of being part of its management team. Ironically, at the same time as these movements were effectively opting in to government, Canberra was opting out by downgrading its regulatory powers and handing over an increasing proportion of decision making around social and economic policy to the corporate sector.

As the decade wore on and the economy hit hard times, the ALP increasingly ignored its allies in these social movements safe in the knowledge that, with these movement's bases demobilized and memberships' plummeting, they were more reliant on government favours than ever. In the case of the green movement, the larger organizations appeared increasingly rudderless as battles over the future of old growth forests and other issues left the public sphere to become purely internal cabinet affairs.<sup>48</sup> The green leadership's embrace of "sustainable development" over critiques of industrial growth also saw them wrong-footed as the ALP elevated "resource security" over environmental protection.<sup>49</sup>

The peace movement had similarly been hurt by this process of cooption. The anti-nuclear movement took a big hit in 1983 when, having devoted much of its resources to getting ALP candidates elected, it saw the Labour Party abandon its electoral commitment to ban uranium mining.<sup>50</sup> Mass mobilisations around peace issues continued however, as the campaign for nuclear disarmament caught on like wildfire. In 1984 and 1985, up to 350 000 Australians attended Palm Sunday peace marches.<sup>51</sup> Whilst much momentum was soon lost through the movement's obsession with holding massive, but essentially symbolic and often boring rallies in order to pressure the Federal government, a number of peace groups continued to opt for direct action in the form of protest camps and peace flotillas.

Towards the end of the 1980s a global resurgence of concern around the environment saw, amongst the recycled toilet rolls and "green" newspaper supplements aimed at consumers, a resurgence in environmental direct action. Spurred on by revelations about the depletion of the Ozone layer and the world's shrinking rainforests, a new generation of activists began to emerge. Influenced by Australian traditions as well as the rise of Earth First! in the US and armed with the knowledge that more civilized forms of lobbying and court action had largely reached a dead end, many of these newcomers engaged in forest and port blockades as well as occupations and actions aimed at the business sector and government departments.

Whilst the more traditional socialist organizations and unions had their own traditions of picketing and industrial action these had largely been abandoned or ignored in the Accord era. In their absence a set of new radical tendencies emerged. These debated one another as well as the older, more defined political groupings and refined their tactics and viewpoints. The result was the emergence of five, by no means completely new and exclusive, tendencies amongst the environmental direct action movement by the end of the decade:

(i) The formal and largely hierarchical organisations such as Greenpeace, ACF and TWS who saw direct action as a lobbying tool to bring the public, political and bureaucratic focus back to green issues. These organizations did not seek to

radically change Australian society or the economy and did not question the basis of Australian democracy and the parliamentary system. In line with this, they favoured a "media friendly" strategy that stressed nonviolence and focused on symbolic actions with the goal of using the mainstream media to win over public opinion and ultimately the support of the government.<sup>52</sup>

(ii) The Non Violent Direct Action (NVDA) groups such as the Melbourne Rainforest Action Group, the Gulf Peace Team and the Australian Nonviolence Network which, largely under the influence of Gandhian influenced theories, saw direct action and consensus decision making as part and parcel of radically transforming a hierarchical and violent society. Favouring the building of grassroots movements over top-down revolutionary or Parliamentary models of social change they attempted to convert their opponents and the public at large through openness and dialogue and hoped to "de-role" the employees and members of the State (police, bureaucrats, politicians, etc) by reaching out to their humanity.

Some NVDA adherents also organised themselves into affinity groups of generally 5 to 15 people who would work together as a self sufficient team providing support and solidarity during actions. An individual affinity group could either act as unit on its own or work in concert with other affinity groups at bigger protests. Meetings (often now dubbed 'spokescouncils') involving delegates from each affinity group involved in large actions were envisaged as way of allowing various groups to communicate with each other, if not make decisions. These were seen as a means of protecting the autonomy of each affinity group whilst also potentially avoiding the difficulties of trying to get hundreds, if not thousands, of protesters to reach consensus.

NVDA adherents believed that physical and verbal violence, property damage and secrecy dehumanized all of those involved in a political issue and created an inconsistency between means and ends. Influential theorist Robert Burrowes criticized the use of secrecy by groups like Greenpeace in their stunts and actions on the basis that "[secrecy] is rooted in fear and contributes to it, whereas nonviolent struggle is essentially about learning to overcome fear."<sup>53</sup> As a result NVDA groups followed a strategy of fully briefing and engaging in dialogue with the police, the media and their opponents before engaging in direct action. They also organised workshops and nonviolence training aimed at preparing activists for actions and minimizing unpredictable situations, which to their thinking often resulted in conflict and violence.<sup>54</sup>

(iii) Militant direct action and anarchist groups who also rejected the existing political structures, saw direct action as part of a transformative process and rejected media based strategies on the basis that they limited diversity, caused self-censorship, privileged activist elites and forced protesters into symbolic and largely ineffectual actions. Like the "orthodox" NVDA tendency these activists tended to organise informally and embraced consensus decision making which involved all of those involved in a group or campaign negotiating decisions rather than operating via majority rule. Some of them also organised along affinity group lines.

Unlike the NVDA groups this stream took a confrontational view towards the employees of the State and in common with many Socialists did not believe that structural and economic oppression could be defeated through the conversion

of those who were benefiting from it. Whilst there were differing positions on the usefulness of sabotage, property damage and physical violence the practices of providing information about plans for action to the police and of submitting to arrest were seen as counterproductive and lending power to one's enemies. NVDA strategies were also critiqued on the basis that they could be rigid and stifling and undermined democracy by imposing an outside set of rules on each and every campaign or struggle. In the case of the remote forest blockades, animal rights actions and other time sensitive issues militant tactics were embraced on the basis that NVDA strategies were unlikely to work quickly enough with relatively small numbers of activists if at all.<sup>55</sup>

(iv) The "feral" scene which emerged around the turn of the decade as members of the urban squatting and anarcho-punk scenes began to travel around the country taking part in forest blockades and counter-cultural festivals whilst also embracing paganism and eco-spirituality.<sup>56</sup> A truly Australian subculture, which had barely been labeled by the time of AIDEX '91 and whose style would evolve and become more codified as the 1990s progressed, ferals were known for their unpredictability, disshelved appearance and substance abuse. Despite their chaotic nature they provided much of the backbone for the ongoing forest blockades engaging in militant direct action and, at times, ecotage at campaigns such as the 1991 Chaelundi forest protest. During the campaign ferals and others from the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA) employed "active resistance" tactics such as blockading roads with tripods and barricades, removing survey pegs, running away from the police and loggers in black wallaby actions, locking on to bulldozers, and mounting platforms high up in trees, to exhaust police resources and halt logging before court action carried the day.<sup>57</sup> Whilst sharing much in common and crossing over with the tendency listed directly above, ferals lacked the ideological coherence of other militants and were (and continue to be) truly their own creatures.

(v) Individuals and local groups who engaged in direct action, took part in campaigns on the basis of immediately challenging the issue at hand and who rejected the police/media strategies of the NVDA groups on the basis of "practicality." These people however were not necessarily interested in radically changing society and were happy to use lobbying, court challenges, electoral strategies, etc.

These tendencies all either initiated their own actions or took part, often with great friction, in common blockades and activities at US bases and in the South East and North East forests. Whilst the NVDA and other tendencies continued to have their differences it was clear that by the beginning of the 1990s that direct action as a preferred method of creating social change was very much back on the agenda. As a result of all the activity these groups engaged in many of the tactics seen at AIDEX '91 had already been refined and consistently practiced over the past few years. Similarly, the debates over protest strategies and the meaning of nonviolence which would erupt during the protest had also been well and truly thrashed out elsewhere. Most importantly, the upsurge in direct action meant that when the protest was advertised as "stopping" AIDEX '91, the majority of those who turned up were ready and willing to take part in a blockade aimed at physically and immediately closing the arms fair down.

## DESIKO, PADEX '86 and AIDEX '89

The most obvious impetus for the 1991 protest was of course the decision by Sydney based exhibition organisers DESIKO Pty Ltd to host a series of trade fairs. These fairs would bring together arms manufacturers with governments and other potential buyers and investors.

Founded in 1984, DESIKO's first foray into the world of arms fairs came the following year when it attempted to launch the Pacific Area Defence Exhibition (PADEX).<sup>58</sup> PADEX organiser Bob Day announced the event as the "first ever exhibition of global defence equipment in the Southern hemisphere" and described it as "one of the largest exhibitions of its type in the world." PADEX was scheduled to take place at Sydney's Royal Agricultural Society showgrounds from May 12-16 1986.<sup>59</sup>

Although PADEX initially attracted interest from over 100 potential exhibitors hailing from 15 different countries,<sup>60</sup> the fact that 1986 was the International Year Of Peace did its organisers few favours. A number of Campaign Against PADEX coalitions sprang up around the country. They brought together a variety of church, union, peace and environmental organizations. Following threats from the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) to place black bans against the event, Bob Day moved it to Darwin, claiming he had been "perturbed by the ferocity of the peace movement."<sup>61</sup>

Although the government's position was to change in 1986 with Cooksey report at this time its official policy was one of not supporting "private defence exhibitions."<sup>62</sup> The Federal ALP refused to lend its imprimatur to the event, and Defence Minister Beazley stated that it would be "inappropriate" to support PADEX during the International Year Of Peace.<sup>63</sup> In the face of its continuing investment in overseas arms fairs and with peace rallies bringing out hundreds of thousands of Australians in support of nuclear disarmament, Bob Day was perhaps closer to the truth in claiming that the ALP was "terrified of losing the peace vote."<sup>64</sup> Once word got out that PADEX would not be receiving assistance from the government, exhibitors began pulling out and Day cancelled the event, claiming losses in excess of \$250 000.<sup>65</sup>

Following the PADEX debacle, DESIKO drafted in former National RSL President Sir William Keys and appointed him director to the company in 1986. His position on the company's board however was not announced until 1990 despite the fact he had been employed as a consultant to the Department of Defence for some time.<sup>66</sup> Using Keys' connections, DESIKO was able to rebuild confidence in its abilities and launch a new event, AIDEX, for 1989. Billed as the "largest, most prestigious event of its kind ever held in the Southern Hemisphere", the fair was held at the NATEX showgrounds from November 28 to 30. 214 companies, governments and other official bodies from fourteen countries took part.<sup>67</sup>

By this time, the anti-nuclear movement had waned and the Defence lobby was riding high. As a result, the Federal government lent much support to the venture. The Department of Defence alone spent \$60 000 on displays,<sup>68</sup> and the Customs service granted AIDEX "events status", which eased many of the problems with importation of weapons displays that PADEX had faced.<sup>69</sup> This time around Defence Minister Beazley officially endorsed the trade. He stated

in the Pacific Defence Reporter that “the extent of this year’s exhibition reflects Australia’s standing in international defence circles and emphasizes our efforts vigorously to market Australian defence goods and services overseas.”<sup>70</sup> The ALP Minister for Industry, Technology and Commerce, John Button, was similarly glowing in his support. He hoped that AIDEX ’89 could “play a valuable role in creating awareness of the significant national, industrial and economic resource embodied in defence related projects.”<sup>71</sup>

Opposition to AIDEX ’89 came on a variety of fronts. Canberra Stop Arms For Export (SAFE), a coalition of 18 groups, began meeting early in the year. Differences over tactics and the definition of nonviolence soon emerged, echoing disputes in the South East forest campaigns as well as those that would erupt during the Nurrungar anti-base action later in the year. Following a couple of meetings, a split in the campaign emerged from May onwards; one group continued to organise a series of protests via the SAFE coalition whilst a new coalition, the Stop AIDEX Campaign (SAC), centred around the Renegade Activist Action Force (RAAF), began to work towards a blockade.

“The main problem was predictably over what constituted the appropriate tactics for protest. One point of view held that we had to be peaceful in order to demonstrate an alternative to the violence inside. Another point was that we were opposed to exploitation, so destruction of property was justifiable—throwing paint on people, destroying or scratching equipment perhaps, or making it inoperable in some way, stink bombs. In between were those who did not agree with these tactics, but felt that people should not be restrained if they felt it was appropriate.”

**PETER D JONES, Nonviolence Today #13, Feb/Mar 1990**

“Myself and my partner at the time, Jan, were traveling around the country in trucks and buses and over time they got used more and more to support protests. We went down to lend our support to the South East forest protests of 1988 and 1989 at Coolangubra and Tantawangalo as part of Operation Red Gum. We were thoroughly bemused by the organization of those protests and the way that arrests were prearranged. The whole thing was a piece of theatre. I’ve got nothing against theatre, but it was bad theatre. Press releases were written and distributed to the media saying ‘200 people were arrested on Sunday morning’ before people had even arrived because an agreement had already been made with the police to arrest 200 people. It was a total sham and it wasn’t having any real effect.

There were a few of us who were annoyed because we’d come to actually stop the logging trucks getting out and the organisers had this symbolic approach. We did the Penises for Peace action to really capture some media attention and got pilloried for that. One of the big Green organisations had done a deal with police over major arrests. To avoid any real disruption of logging, but still get headlines, they organised for people to lemming-like put their finger over the line of the exclusion zones and receive a charge sheet reading ‘You placed a part of person over the line, to wit your right index finger.’ We wanted to subvert that so that the charge sheet to read ‘a part of person over the line, to wit your penis.’



We also helped run a real blockade. It was a public road and the police kept pulling us up to say that they had an agreement with the protest organisers, but we kept saying 'We're not part of that protest.' Because we weren't following the agreed rules we were accused of being militaristic and decided that we would adopt the name RAAF to make fun of that. Forming this group that had an approach that used fun, was into direct action and refused to tell the police everything we were doing set the framework for what was to come later.

Following a number of political blues in the SE forests we decided to take a break in Canberra. We were staying with other activists so we heard about AIDEX '89 and went along to a meeting. Although a protest against the arms fair wasn't going to have a huge effect in itself on militarism, AIDEX did present itself as an event where all the people involved in the arms industry were going to be together at the one time and in the one place. It was a logical target and would also allow the peace movement to do what DESIKO wanted to do - present the arms industry to the world.

There were people at the meetings from the established Canberra peace groups and they were all good people, but they were in a completely different headspace to us. They weren't responding to our ideas and since we were full time activists with plenty of time to put into it we decided to start the Stop AIDEX Campaign based around a blockade."

**JACOB GRECH, Interview, August 2008**

Other than proposing a more confrontational approach to AIDEX, RAAF also took the long view. It saw the protest not only as the first step in a longer campaign, but also as an opportunity to broaden the scope of the peace movement. Whilst RAAF and the others organising the blockade rejected the strictures of NVDA, they did not advocate violence. They blended a disruptive, blockade based approach with the building of alliances with potential allies in the ALP, unions and members of the public service unhappy with the direction of government policy.

"When we first heard about AIDEX in 1989 we were aware that they'd booked the complex for 1989, 1991 and 1993. For ourselves, RAAF, it was always going to be a 5 or 6 year campaign.

Most people in the green movement and the peace movement at that time were fixated on saving this piece of forest or stopping this agreement or whatever. We were interested in going beyond that to question our existence as white people in an occupied nation who were benefiting from the subjugation of other people all around the world. We agreed that it was important for people to stop this particular thing or save that, but that they also needed to look at the rest of the picture.

In 1989 the Left in Australia hadn't really taken on issues of corporatisation in the way they have now with the anti-globalisation movement. People were mainly working on individual campaigns. What AIDEX '89 and the arms trade enabled us and others to do was talk about the links inherent in the military-industrial complex to the corporatisation of world industry and the growth of the multinationals.

RAAF were also influenced by the situationists. We weren't trying to recruit

people to our way of thinking and we knew that we were operating in a time in which the Left was trying to put the brakes on rather than being able to effect progressive social change. Did we believe that we could really tear up the fabric of Western capitalism? No. Did we believe that we could have a major impact on the world's arm trade by getting a few hundred people to Canberra to jump up and down? No. What we wanted to do was create a twist in people's consciousness, to create a situation where people would see, as a slogan one of our members came up with said, 'That at the heart of every just cause is the cause of justice.' We felt that a blockade of AIDEX could bring together people involved in all the different causes and get them to see that all those issues were part of the same rapacious monster, that saving the forests was tied up in stopping militarism and vice versa."

**Jacob Grech, Interview, August 2008**

Whilst SAFE continued to organise for three days of action, including different activities organised by the Canberra Programme for Peace, as well as professional and Inter-Faith groups, RAAF set about organising a campsite and proposed blockade of the fair.

"We didn't have long to organise, just a few months. We knew that AIDEX was booked in at NATEX for '91 and '93. We never thought we could shut it down in '89 because we only found out about it in August and it was happening in November. By September we'd come up with a logo and a name for the campaign and we went to the Nurrungar anti-bases protest with that. We began to talk to people as if it was just happening, 'You gonna be at AIDEX next month? See you there.' We didn't have the internet, but we had good phone networks.

We set up the SAC with a bunch of other groups from around the country. RAAF started actions in Canberra by building a giant arm, about twenty foot long with a fist on the end whose every finger joint was made out of a drum. You could fit twenty people inside and we would wheel it around Canberra to ram the doors of arms companies. We also held stalls in which we sold boxing gloves as an alternative to missiles with the slogan 'Causes less collateral damage', and offered self defense classes as an alternative to militarism.

That year's Kangaroo '89 exercises saw Australian and US troops fighting a fictitious country called Kameria. Earlier in the year we'd set up a Kamerian embassy and now we were set up Kamerian Defence Industries. We'd have big blow up hammers and be hitting each other and so on...

There were just a handful of people involved in RAAF and we knew that we needed to get people to the gates. We knew that the socialists would come so we didn't have to lobby them. We also knew that we needed people who didn't have preconceived formulas and who were available to travel. So we went off every other weekend to talk to groups and meetings and went to the hippy festivals and markets and music festivals. RAAF didn't hold big public meetings, others did, but we went to events and just talked to everyone we could. It was a very effective form of grassroots organising. We'd rock up in the big black bus and assorted vehicles and cook falafels and talk up the protest as this big event. People later came not from any entrenched political



The walking wounded meet the Canberra police at AIDEX '89 (Jules McLellan)

understanding, but because they'd heard that this was where the action was going to be. But the argument was that entrenched political understanding was not what was needed, a sense of outrage was.

There was also a good alternative community in Canberra at the time with things like School Without Walls (SWOW) and we had a young people's network through that. Canberra also had this alternative junkie scene which was fairly unique and a lot of them were constantly in trouble with the police and they came on side.

Alongside these newer people we also had the anti-bases people from around the country and people from the Sydney Peace Squadron. None of these were groups were very large. At AIDEX '89 we probably had 100 from the Left and peace groups, 100 from the Canberra alternative community and 100 of the traveling freaks plus the church and mainstream peace groups who came down at different points during the protest to do things separate to the blockade. The greenie blockaders weren't really there. The unions also got involved in a small way by making it an official TLC picket which gave it some legitimacy.

We had some posters printed by a Sydney firm who put an activist surcharge on their commercial jobs to pay for things like this. Most importantly though we asked all the groups who were coming to produce their own posters. Campaign Against Militarism's (CAM) poster said 'A fete worse than death', Sydney Anti-Bases Coalition (SABC) had a totally different one and Adelaide had a different one again. Different people respond to different things so the more variety the better and once again it gave the police and media no clear target.

RAAF, being an anarchist organisation primarily, didn't want to go down the standard path of controlling the protest. People saw RAAF as control freaks, but we weren't. What we did was control things to the point that no one could take over the whole thing. We had the churches and the NVDA activists saying that everyone would have to follow a particular set of rules and do non violence training to take part. We didn't want them or anyone else dictating how it would function so we took on organising the infrastructure of the protest. We insisted on central control and then abdicated all control and said 'Protest however you want to protest.' We tried to create a place where all the tendencies could come together and pursue their different ideas at once.

The idea was to create a vacuum in which magic could happen and in 1989, and to a greater extent in 1991, magic did happen. Because there was no central control the security guards and police didn't know where any particular group was going to hit next. This was not only because they have good infiltration of centrally controlled groups, but because we're human and they've got good psychologists and they learn to predict how leaders will act. However because things were chaotic they didn't know what people would do."

**Jacob Grech, Interview, August 2008**

Over the three days of protest the various political tendencies participated in different forms of action. These included a rally in the city, a silent vigil at the war memorial, an Inter-Faith service outside NATEX, and a Quaker stall inside AIDEX. A protest was also held outside a conference at the Australian National

University (ANU) addressed by Defence Minister, Kim Beazley. A number of demonstrators unsuccessfully attempted to prevent deliveries to the NATEX site before attempting to blockade the AIDEX event itself. Despite the efforts of NVDA activists to create dialogue with the police, relations at the ANU protest and during the blockade were poor. Police arrested 33 protesters and many others complained of rough treatment.

"When the protest began we set up a campsite in the Showground car park next to Flemington Road. There was a tradition of show-people camping there. We put in an application to have a festival on site on the Sunday and to have people camp there until Tuesday. We got a permit, the minimum number of toilets, water, public liability insurance and all that and held the festival. The TLC gave help with a site shed.

It became news on the Monday and was already national by the time AIDEX opened on the Tuesday. At one point the police issued all the protester's vehicles with tickets for illegal parking, but I don't think anyone actually paid one and no one I knew got in any trouble over it. The police largely left the campsite alone until the Wednesday at which time they came through the camp early in the morning. They cut all the ropes on the tents and then cleared us all out.

During the protest all the entrances to NATEX were picketed. Having the pickets already in place created a focus for those arriving at the protest, but each gate was different and people did actions away from them as there were over seven kilometers of fences.

On the first day we had a march from Parliament House to the site with the giant arm. It was stinking hot. People then tried to block the gates and get in front of the trucks bringing equipment in. The police would come and throw them out of the way. They'd lick their wounds and then throw themselves in front of the gate again.

One of the most successful forays into AIDEX in 1989 [in which protesters got on NATEX's roof] I didn't know about until the police told me that people had been arrested. No one knew that it was happening. The people who did it didn't know it was happening until they were sitting under a tree and noticed that no one was around and just went inside.

Like everyone else RAAF went ahead as its own affinity group once the protest began. It did its own actions which were no more important or legitimate than any others. Protests rarely live up to the strict NVDA version of affinity groups where everything is very organised and each group sends a delegate to a meeting to pass around the magic talking stick. What tends to happen is like at the footy or a festival or anywhere where people come together. Like minded souls congregate and do things, in this case actions, together. There were however some organised affinity groups who came a long with planned actions, etc.

During AIDEX '89 we never had a single group, camp meeting. People, particularly socialist groups, would come and tell us that we needed to have them and I'd say 'Go ahead, organise it.' Then they'd come back and say 'No one came.' (laughter) I'd tell them that I wasn't going to go around and make

people come and if people weren't responding to their call then so be it.

In terms of communication between the different sections of the protest, things were very informal. RAAF brought along walkie talkies as did CAM from Melbourne and we put them all on the same frequency. Revolve, Canberra's recycling depot, became RAAF's one and only corporate sponsor (laughter) and threw in some more walkie talkies which we handed around. Word got around if something was happening.

The police didn't know how to handle it. The ACT government had just gotten control of some of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) alongside the ACT police and the lines of communication were very confused. No one knew how big the protest would be and the police had only been talking with the mainstream peace people from Stop Arms For Export (SAFE), so they hadn't anticipated anything more than a peaceful protest.

There were lots of little actions. Women did weaving and singing outside the fences. One of the most effective actions saw two young girls from SWOW dress up in uniforms, for probably the first time in their lives, and step out on the road with chalk to draw a pedestrian crossing. They chalked in these crossings all up and down the roads. As soon as they saw a truck they'd step out onto the road and hold it up which gave other people the opportunity to jump on the back or block it or whatever.

Penises For Peace also got revived. One night we were sitting around and over a dozen blokes thought it would be appropriate to daub their bodies with slogans like 'Dangling for disarmament', 'Missile envy', 'Balls not bombs', 'Hard-ons not hardware', 'Jiggling for justice', etc and ram the gates of AIDEX hidden in the giant arm. The fun ensued when the uniformed police saw the arm and unaware that there were men inside tipped the whole thing over. There were arms and legs and everything exposed to the media that night.

We expected little from the media other than coverage. Our main aim was to let people in Canberra know that an arms fair was happening where weapons were being sold for lots of money to cause pain and suffering in other countries. Secondly we wanted them to know that there was a big group of people opposed to it. Once people knew that, they could make up their own minds. The protest also let the AIDEX organisers and the ACT government know that 1991 was going to cost them dearly.

We knew that we didn't have the time or numbers to stop the show in 1989, but in RAAF we felt that if we could mount an effective protest then we could turn AIDEX into a big story on the Left. Then with some luck and hard work we could aim to make a bigger impact in 1991 and then close it down in 1993. Straight after the '89 protest we began talking up the '91 one."

**JACOB GRECH, Interview, August 2008**

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<sup>59</sup> Bob Day, June 1985.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Young, “Peace Lobby Sabotaging Arms Show,” *The Australian*, October 18 1985.

<sup>61</sup> Clare Arthurs, “Defence Trade Fair ‘Undermined’,” *The Australian*, November 7 1985.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Young, “The Foolish, Holier-Than-Thou Scuttling of Our Defence Expo,” *The Australian*, December 2 1985.

<sup>64</sup> Arthurs, “Defence Trade Fair ‘Undermined’.”

<sup>65</sup> Young, “The Foolish, Holier-Than-Thou Scuttling of Our Defence Expo.”

<sup>66</sup> Grech, “Aidex '91.”

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Day.

<sup>70</sup> Kim Beazley, “Defence Policy's Contribution to Industrial Development,” *Pacific Defence Reporter* 16, no. 5 (1989).

<sup>71</sup> John Button, “Government Encourages Technology,” *Pacific Defence Reporter* 16, no. 5 (1989).





# THE BUILD UP TO AIDEX '91



Finger pointing on the Sunday night picket line, AIDEX '91 (Leo Bild)



Tuesday mass arrests (Leo Bild)

## THE BUILD UP TO AIDEX '91

**Following the conclusion** of AIDEX '89, DESIKO was quick to hail the event as an "unprecedented success" and begin promoting its 1991 event. Similarly, activists around the country also began working towards planned protests. Although much of the initial impetus for another blockade continued to come from the Canberra based RAAF, the Stop AIDEX Campaign branched out significantly in 1990 to include supporters in every state.

Alongside these efforts came an enormous lobbying and education campaign run by a myriad of churches and social justice organizations including the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, Action for World Development and the Australian Council of Churches. Community Aid Abroad (CAA) ran a postcard campaign aimed at Defence Minister Robert Ray and also serenaded delegates with peace songs as they shuffled into the ALP Federal Conference.

Greens WA Senator, Jo Vallentine, and the Australian Democrats produced educational material and newsletters, asked questions in the Senate and moved an urgency motion calling for the cancellation of AIDEX. 51 politicians from state and Federal governments also signed a petition against the fair. Union support was strong, and the ACTU, the United Trades and Labour Council of South Australia and others around the country passed resolutions against the fair. A women's telephone link-up was also organised across all the States and Territories allowing feminist networks to share information and organise for a women's action in Canberra.

With the national campaign gaining momentum, July 1991 saw an initial victory for the protesters when the ACT government moved to cancel DESIKO's booking at the NATEX showgrounds. After DESIKO threatened to sue for breach of contract the ALP led minority government backed off from the cancellation, but held firm in passing a motion to "endorse the principle that the ACT should not be used for promoting the international arms trade." With this in place it was made clear to DESIKO that AIDEX would not happen at NATEX in 1993. Despite Naval reservist Anthony Grazebook hailing an "AIDEX bookings triumph" in the pages of the Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, the number of stalls booked for AIDEX '91 was already down on 1989 and the signs for DESIKO were not looking good.

"During the build up to 1991 our lobbying of the members of the ACT and Federal government who weren't already sympathetic wasn't about the rights and wrongs of the arms trade. Instead we just wanted them to know that if they went ahead with their support for AIDEX then it would cost them financially and electorally. Despite what DESIKO was claiming, the ACT was getting very little out of the event and we were able to show that it would cost them a lot more to keep it on. The 1989 protest served as a warning in that regard and we had promised something much bigger this time around."

**JACOB GRECH, Interview, August 2008**

## CANBERRA

In Canberra the Network for Peace (NfP) brought together the local branches of groups such as the Medical Association for the Prevention of War (MAPW),

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and Movement Against Uranium Mining (MAUM) to lobby and organise protests not related to the proposed blockade. The Canberra Regional Meeting of the Quaker Peace Committee also applied for a stall within AIDEX and hired two part time workers to organise the alternative Point Of Impact conference in concert with the Peace Research Centre at the ANU.

RAAF meanwhile continued to build on the strengths of the 1989 protest by focusing its promotional efforts on drawing the connections between the arms trade and other campaigns as well as highlighting the penetration of militarism into mainstream society. Whilst many others became involved in planning for and promoting the 1991 protest, RAAF, based around the partnership of Jan and Jacob Grech, continued to play a crucial role in framing the event as an anti-corporate blockade aimed at closing AIDEX down.



"As we worked on promoting the 1991 protest we continued to draw the links between the arms industry and all the other issues. It wasn't our side that brought up the corporatisation of politics, it was the government because not only were they selling everything off, but the things they kept they corporatised. As corporate entities they were under different rules. For example, with ADI, prior to corporatisation the peace movement could use questions in Parliament to find out what they were making, who they sold it to, where it went, how much it sold for, etc. Once they were corporatised it was all

hidden behind corporate in-confidence rules.

We already saw that governments reflected the will of the rich and powerful and that when the big arms companies said 'Jump' they said 'How high', but this was a new phase. Under Hawke and Keating there was less and less power vested in the state, and governments had less control over companies than ever. Since the State was making itself irrelevant it seemed like it was time to bypass it and just go straight for the corporations who were the real decision makers.

We were trying to expose the links and show who the 'Masters of War' were. We'd talk with people and say 'You might know Westinghouse as a benign company that makes fridges, but this is what else they do. You might like wearing your Blundstone boots, but did you know they also make military spec boots for the Malaysian army to kick in the heads of the Penan people trying to defend the Sarawak rainforest.' With the government you could argue they were doing this or that, but by making the companies the focus it became much clearer because you could say 'This company made this bullet which shot this person in this country because they were fighting for this cause.' So the aim was to bring it down to the companies and their profits and how much say they had in the running of the world.

We did a lot of research and produced the "Australians Dealing In Death and Destruction: AIDEX '91" book to name the arms companies and expose what they were doing. We also listed their addresses and phone numbers and

managers' names. We launched it on Hiroshima Day 1991 on the steps of the Sydney Stock Exchange with lots of street theatre and speakers."

**Jacob Grech, Interview, August 2008**

"The Australians Dealing In Death and Destruction book was built on things like information from Defence journals and the like, but a lot of it came from sitting on the phone and talking to secretaries at various companies. People aren't usually very nice to secretaries, but Jan and Jacob were and that helped them build a map of the spider web of arms companies and joint ventures."

**FLICK RUBY, Interview, September 2008**

In Canberra itself RAAF continued to build on the networks with sympathetic unions, public servants and ALP members that had been established in 1989. The group and its supporters also began putting in place the infrastructure for the protest by once more booking the car park across from the NATEX site for a campsite and organising a kitchen, portaloos, media liaison, etc.

"Canberra had a very small activist scene and everyone went to one another's rallies. The Peace Centre where we were based shared a building with the Democratic Socialist Party and the Environment Centre. It was a small town and many people in all sorts of positions got to know who we were and if they were sympathetic then they leaked us information or provided us with resources or whatever.

In 1991 the unions helped in a big way by providing and funding portaloos, site sheds, water tanks, our office, telephone lines, etc. We met up with them formally and informally and pointed out that the ACT ALP and the union movement had good policies on defence and the arms trade. The end of the Cold War saw a lot of discussion around converting military industries into social use. Many unions wanted a manufacturing led recovery and wanted an independent foreign policy, but didn't want it based on arms exports.

Word spread far and wide in the build up to 1991. At one point I had the Superintendent of Special Branch wanting to know how many people were coming because he'd been at church and the Pastor was talking about the evils of the arms trade and asking people to billet protesters (laughter). The Churches played a huge role in 1991."

**JACOB GRECH, 3CR Interview, 2007**

RAAF also initiated a number of protest actions around the ACT and NSW, often targeting key individuals within the arms industry. Alongside these they also attended other rallies and protests to spruik the November blockade.

"From 1989 to 1991 we were holding protests at various arms companies. We also went to all the other protests around the country and pointed out how their issues were linked to militarism and then pointed the finger at the military corporations. We met with the education activists to point out how arms companies were getting involved in scholarships and funding. We met with the Health professionals to say 'Why is that for every one scientist working on health research in the world there are four working for the military? Why is military spending going up when education and health spending is going down?



Why are these resources being reallocated?' With all these campaigns and the repression of activists in Chile and the greenies and everyone else, we not only tried to show the way they linked into the arms corporations, but also brought the issue back to what was happening here in Australia and what people could do here.

We said to everyone 'It's not our protest, come and do your protest here.' So once AIDEX '91 happened there was this wonderful, organic, anarchic quality which enabled socialists to do their thing at one gate whilst women were doing their thing and the greenies were talking about environmental destruction and the arms trade and church groups were talking about murder and war and killing being sinful.

We kept very busy. We found out which private school that the organiser of AIDEX's kid went to and organised a debate at the school on the rights and wrongs of the arms trade. We found out where some of the heads of these companies went to church and organised for someone to speak from the pulpit about the evils of the arms trade, which the Pope had just come out against. We'd also leaflet buildings and companies to let people know who they were working alongside. It wasn't just RAAF and people we knew doing this sort of thing because once others got a hold of the "Australians Dealing In Death and Destruction" book they were able to go and personally confront the arms dealers themselves.

We had our house firebombed on a few occasions and had the brake lines sliced on our bus. There were false accusations put into the police. We got belted by people, had a car set on fire and got evicted from a house. There were various forms of harassment.

We also organised internationally by telephone for various head offices of companies to all be hit at midnight Greenwich meantime on particular dates. In some countries it would be delegations of Quakers with a letter asking them not to sell weapons anymore, in other places it would be anarchists doing something heavier. By doing this in twelve countries all at once they had to realise that like them we were also a globalised force.

The week before AIDEX '91 they had the Asia Pacific Police Technology (APTECH) Exhibition. Some activists managed to get that raided by the AFP because ACT law said that a number of weapons they had on display could not be sold in the Territory.

At that time there were also big environmental blockades happening at places like Fraser Island and Chaelundi. The dole was relatively easy to get and there was a big upswing in green direct action around particular patches of land that could be saved. It became a lifestyle for people. Earth First! (EF!) in the US had taken a lot of inspiration from Australia and what had happened at Tuntabla Falls and the Franklin and now this new generation was in turn being inspired by EF!. We took part in those big protests and talked up AIDEX '91.

The Gulf War was probably the biggest factor in making 1991 successful. There had been a sense for a long time that the expansion of the military and the military's intrusion into popular culture, with advertising and sponsoring events to raise money for disabled children and all that, was leading up to Australia's involvement in new wars. In 1989 we were talking about the arms

trade fuelling wars in other countries, but by 1991 Australia had been in a war itself. The peace movement had been very moribund and the war reactivated it. We attended rallies and always brought the issue back to AIDEX which gave some people the shits (laughter). After Operation Desert Storm had ended there were all these people who had come out as pacifists and signed up to networks and attended meetings and RAAF and all the other peace groups were able to tap into that for AIDEX '91.

On top of that Australia's involvement in Bougainville was happening. Then the Dili Massacre took place the week before AIDEX. Because all these big things were happening, the smaller issue of AIDEX, which wouldn't have gotten so much attention on its own, became much bigger. There was an impetus that the AIDEX protest was able to tap into and feed into.

A year before the 1991 protest we set up a programme of what would happen on different days. Different groups proposed different events and they went down on the timetable. The women's groups wanted a specific day of events because women are the majority of the victims of war so they got the Wednesday. The greenies wanted a day so the Thursday was set down as the Environmental Day of Action. Whilst that framework was proposed and discussed with groups around the country what happened once the protest actually began was quite different."

**JACOB GRECH, Interview, May 2008**

"I got to Canberra about a month before AIDEX began. I'd been working on the campaign full time for six months. I first heard about AIDEX and got involved with RAAF when I saw a black bus with all these strange people in it at the January 1991 EF! Gathering. I'd been involved in organising women's anti-war stuff, but once they filled me in on the arms fair I dropped everything and joined the campaign. Initially I was based in Northern NSW and was traveling up and down the East Coast, as far Cairns, distributing flyers and information and the "Australians Dealing In Death and Destruction" book. All of the RAAF people were very mobile at this time and often weren't in Canberra itself...

For a month before AIDEX began, we lived and worked in the Canberra Programme for Peace Office, and in the weeks leading up to the campaign there was a lot happening. There were people building props with guns turning into trees and all that creative side of things. My work ranged before and during the protest from debating [Defence Department spokesperson] Brigadier Adrian D'Hage on radio to booking bins and ferrying lawyers around. I also was involved in the national women's AIDEX phone hook ups and organising and put together a women's handbook about militarism and gender which wasn't as widely distributed as I would have liked.

One of the many logistical jobs I was involved in was hiring industrial sized recycling and garbage bins for the campsite from a company called Waste-Hawk. Unfortunately the bins wound up featuring in some of the actions and barricades during the protest which the old Waste-Hawke people weren't too happy about (laughter)."

**FLICK RUBY, Interview, September 2008**

“RAAF played a big role in coordinating things and cajoling different groups to get them involved. They also spread a lot of information and resourced people. This was in the period before email so they acted as a conduit so that the different interstate groups, like ourselves at FOE [in Melbourne], weren’t replicating each others’ roles too much... Having people on the ground in Canberra was vital. I think that just a handful of people acting in a concerted way made all the difference.”

**“DELILAH”, Interview, August 2008**

## VICTORIA

Catholic peace activists in Bathurst set up their own lobby group whilst in Melbourne 15 groups formed the Victorian Anti-AIDEX Coalition. Within this, various social justice, political and church organisations such as CAA, Pax Christi and the Australian Democrats, produced newsletters, posters and educational material. Friends of the Earth and Campaign Against Militarism engaged in similar efforts whilst also coordinating non violence training and organising a series of rallies and actions.

“CAM was a network around Australia with groups in Perth and up the east coast. It was probably the primary activist network organising direct action against Australia’s arms industry at the time. It was a shift away from the more established 80’s anti-bases and peace movement organisations in that it organised more autonomously and with a strong direct action focus. CAM’s primary focus was countering Australia’s expanding arms export industry and its impact upon regional conflicts.”

**ANTHONY KELLY, Interview, August 2008**

“Other than being a student and a member of CAM, I was working as the National Union of Students (NUS) State Secretary so a lot of my role was raising awareness on campuses and at the state level via the NUS office, given the organisation had an anti-militarist policy in its charter then. We got articles published and organised car pooling and billeting, but the main thing was getting blanket coverage out via posters and radio. This was all before the internet so the main way of getting your message out was to use lo-fi, non-commercial media.”

**SUSAN LUCKMAN, Interview, August 2008**

“AIDEX represented a perfect focus for the peace movement because all the governments and all the big and small arms companies were represented there. They may as well have painted a target on themselves. It was so blatant that it had to be slapped down...”

FOE set up its own campaign group which collaborated with others in Melbourne as well as with the interstate groups in discussing what sort of protest would happen and what needed to be done to prepare for it. FOE had been quite involved in the anti-Gulf War protests and suffered attacks as a result, including getting its offices being broken into and smashed up. The



Melbourne anti-war protests were huge and fiery, but ultimately very short lived. In the wash up of those a number of us from FOE started to focus on AIDEX. We got very busy from about six months out.

There were lots of meetings held in Melbourne. The Church groups, particularly Pax Christi, and others like FOE held information nights and public meetings. There were a lot of media interviews done and fliers and posters distributed about the arms trade. One of the key things that people did with the educational stuff and actions was to try to draw the links of AIDEX back to what was happening here in Melbourne. If you bring an issue back to people's own backyard, they're more likely to get it.

The NVDA people in Melbourne were very insistent that everyone should adhere to their standards of direct action. That came up in workshops and meetings and personal discussions. Even though most people managed to work together and accepted that the protest would involve a 'broad church', the hard core NVDA element were very absolute and hard line in their vision of what was going to happen. Nevertheless, there was a diversity of action that came out of Melbourne with all sorts of people pursuing different ends and using different ways to get the word out...

We did an action outside the Defence Science and Technology Organisation in Fisherman's Bend. We held an overnight camp outside the front gates. I don't know why we had to camp overnight, but we did (laughter). Sitting around and sharing time together did however help consolidate us as a group.

The next morning we held a picket and the police went absolutely off at us. There was only a small crowd of protesters, under 100, yet they really got stuck in. We weren't a huge threat and they knew we'd be clearing out after a few hours, but they belted people and were quite violent, which was a taste of things to come in Canberra.

The protest was not without its moments of hilarity. Someone had brought a ladder which the protesters kept trying to put up against the wall. The police would push it away and then it would go up again in a new spot. It became farcical with a couple of activists marching up and down the length of the wall with the ladder whilst the police shuffled back and forth like Keystone cops. Everyone fell about laughing in the end.

Before the picket happened there was a secret action done where we dropped a huge banner off the West Gate Bridge. It was all very clandestine and fun. We did the drop at dawn with two professional climbers who went down with the banner. They just pulled up and hopped out of a car with the banner whilst the driver kept going. The banner was massive and read 'Stop AIDEX '91.' They hung it from the middle of the bridge and you could read it from miles around. It was visible during peak hour and although it didn't get much media a lot of people saw it. The police eventually pulled the climbers up, but let them go without any charges.

There were a few other rallies held around Melbourne in the build up to AIDEX. The last one was at the GPO about a week or so before AIDEX started. Because we were all so far out of the mainstream at the time we hadn't realised that we'd called the rally for the same day as the Myer Christmas Parade. The parade had tens of thousands people watching it and took over the

whole city with its epicentre in the Bourke Street Mall [where the GPO is located].

I was part of an anarchist street theatre group called Operation Rhubarb. We turned up with our death masks and a coffin and we were all dripping blood, etc to symbolise the outcome of the arms trade. We came marching down Bourke Street and hit this huge crowd of people who were watching the parade. We didn't know how we were going to get through to the protest. Then one of the people at the front of our group shouted 'Excuse me we're late, let us through' and sure enough the crowd parted and we joined in the parade (laughter) as it turned the corner into the mall. You could hear the announcer faltering as he said something like 'That was the girl scouts, aren't they lovely. And now we have, er, what is that one...' The cops came up, but they couldn't do anything because there were too many people around. They were foaming at the mouth and desperately whispering at us, 'You're scaring the kiddies', whilst we were saying, 'Don't worry, we'll hop off in a minute, we just want to get to the GPO.'

Although it was completely impromptu and random, the fact that the Gulf War and Dili massacre had just happened meant that at least some of the people present would have understood what it was about. Or at least they would have more than if we were to crash this year's Myer parade (laughter). You can get away with a lot more if you're creative than if you just stand there ranting into a megaphone."

**"DELILAH", Interview, August 2008**

## NSW

Amongst a series of public meetings and forums held on the arms trade in NSW, the Sydney-Newcastle forum of Religions for Justice, with the support of Australian Catholic Relief, the Australian Council of Churches and the Joint Task for One World Week, organised a major seminar in Sydney looking at Christian responses to war. Members of the anti-US warship flotilla, the Sydney Peace Squadron (SPS), also performed an action in which they hung anti-AIDEX banners from cranes on Cockatoo Island. Alongside the Sydney Anti-Bases Coalition (SABC), SPS and others also engaged in efforts aimed at getting people to the Canberra blockade.

Novocastrians got active with the Newcastle University Students Association passing a motion against the fair and organising a bus to Canberra. An anti-war art exhibition was also held whilst the Newcastle Peace Forum organised a series

# STOP THE WAR FAIR

## STOP AIDEX 91

The Australian International Defence Exhibition is a government sponsored gathering of the world's militarists behind closed doors in Canberra, November 22-23. Arms dealers, generals & government officials will meet to plan and continue the trade in death and destruction.

# RALLY


Nov 16, '91

Melb. GPO

11am

Join the PROTEST CAMP CANBERRA 22-28 NOV.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST MILITARISM & ANTI-AIDEX COALITION 419 5937



of meetings and non violence training workshops. Although most educational efforts around the country focused on the trend within Australian manufacturing towards increased involvement with the arms industry, one effort to highlight some positives in the Hunter Valley region came to a predictable end.

"The Newcastle Peace Forum decided to do something positive. Bob Berghout and his wife Moya decided that they wanted to give an award to a medium sized manufacturing enterprise, as defined by the Federal government, who weren't involved in the arms industry. They proposed having a ceremony and put in \$1000 towards an award which included a trophy with a missile getting broken into a peace sign. We looked around and we couldn't find one. The arms industry was that all pervasive. People couldn't have boycotted it if they tried."

**JACOB GRECH, Interview, August 2008**

## QUEENSLAND

Members of the Brisbane Peace Network, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, the Building Workers Industrial Union (BWIU) and others met on June 6 1991 for a teach-in and strategy meeting. Formally launching the Queensland Stop AIDEX (QSA) campaign a few weeks later, the group adopted a statement of unity in which it described itself as "a loose coalition of groups and individuals who have agreed to use nonviolent means in all activities undertaken in this campaign to oppose the AIDEX '91 arms bazaar."

QSA's first activities involved unsuccessfully lobbying delegates to the ALP national conference. Approaches to the Queensland Trades and Labour Council, Metal and Engineering Workers Union and Queensland Teachers Union proved more fruitful; all three issued statements against the arms fair or provided other support. A campaign was soon launched targeting the twenty Queensland companies attending AIDEX as well as the state government's decision to invest \$20 000 in a pavilion for the bazaar.

"We lobbied, we marched and fundraised. We picketed the Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, on a visit to Queensland. He was given a letter opposing AIDEX '91. Picketers made a good impression on the crowd and the action was extensively covered in the media. Bob's parliamentary secretary responded with the now familiar form letter.

Our next action was on the 14th August, People's Day at the Royal Show. We picketed the main entrance and leafleted trains going to the Exhibition. Our purpose was to highlight the Queensland government's role through the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development (DBIRD). We picketed all day, had actions at the DBIRD stall and the Armed Forces display, and two of our members dressed in black with covered faces wandered around to symbolize the merchants of death.

We had planned to visit the Minister [for DBIRD], but we only received a form letter back with no reply to our request. So we decided that if he wouldn't see us then we would have to go to see him. The Stop AIDEX

campaign assembled on the 24th of September in the city to voice our opposition to the Queensland arms trade. We had street theatre followed by a silent funeral procession to the office of the Minister. There we were locked out in the true spirit of the Joh era.

The Minister's private secretary came to see us and wouldn't give us a meeting. This called for drastic action. A sit-in was called until our demands were met, and a vigorous media campaign was waged. Supporters also rang and wrote to the Minister's office. We stayed all night and were about to call a hunger strike when they caved in and agreed to see us...

The campaign also picketed outside QANTAS, Commonwealth Bank Travel and the Defence Department. We performed street theatre in the mall and handed out thousands of leaflets to the citizens of Brisbane. Stalls were also held at progressive fairs and rallies in Brisbane."

**BRENDAN GREENHILL, 'Queensland Stop AIDEX', Social Alternatives, Vol 10, No 4, 1991.**

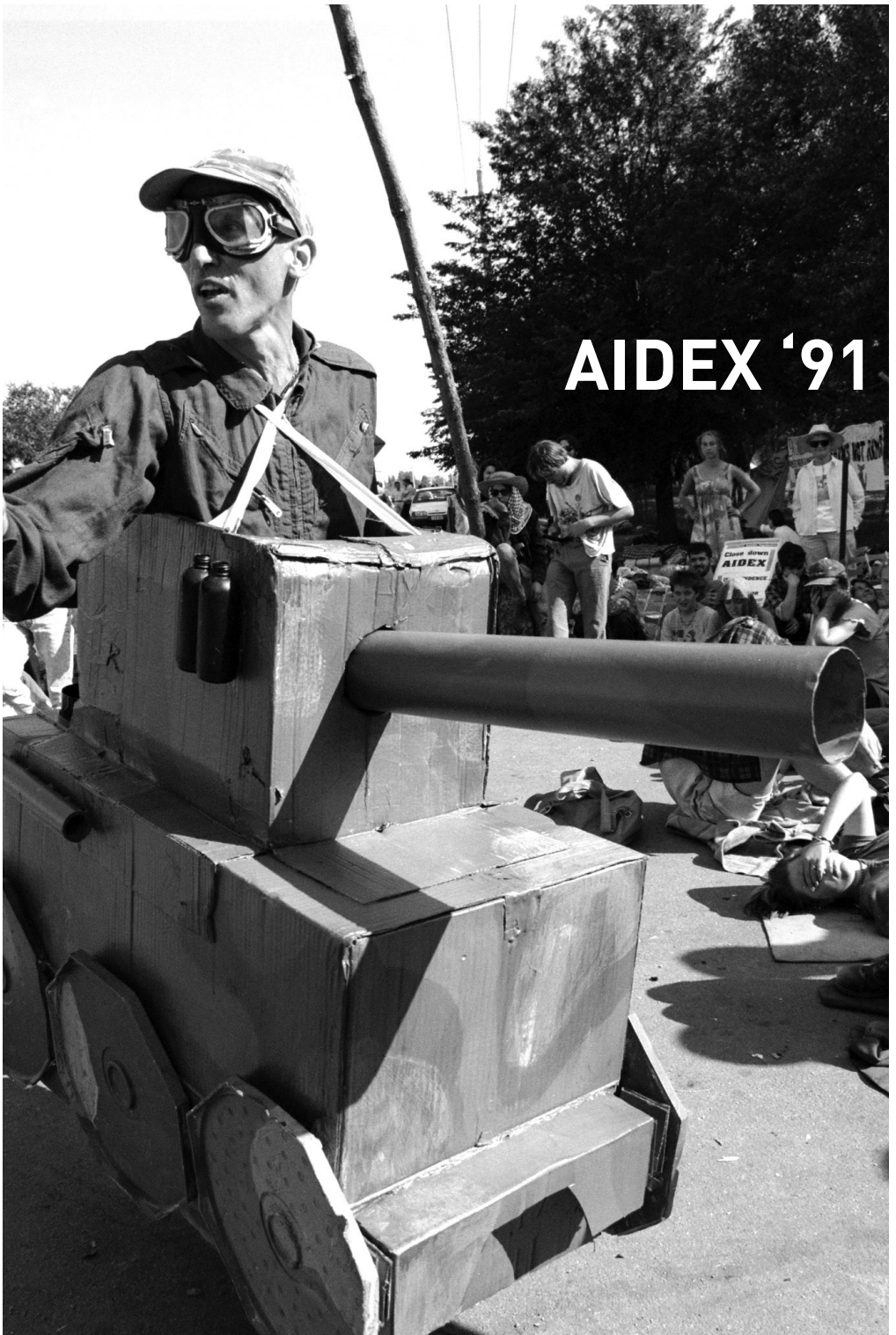
## ELSEWHERE

Across the country, numerous Quaker, Uniting Church and Catholic churches wrote in protest to State and Federal Parliamentarians, and the Australian Council of Leaders of Religious Institutes, representing 13000 members, launched an anti-AIDEX campaign in June.

In Perth, the Stop Arms For Export (SAFE) coalition was formed bringing together members of the Australian Peace Committee (APC), People for Nuclear Disarmament (PND), Greens WA, CAA and others. Representatives of SAFE met with officers of the State's Minister for State Development to unsuccessfully lobby against the West Australian government's involvement in AIDEX. The coalition also held a mock referendum in the Murray Street Mall on November 12 in which 90% of the 400 people polled voted against the holding of AIDEX. During the AIDEX event itself, members of SAFE who were unable to get to Canberra held a vigil in Perth every day from November 21 to 28. Members of environmental direct action groups such as the Campaign to Save Native Forests and the Perth Rainforest Action Group also made the rip across the Nullarbor to Canberra.

Adelaide's Council of Priests called on the federal government to withdraw from AIDEX, and various South Australian peace groups began organising for a one day conference on a "World Without Weapons" to be held at the South Australian Institute of Teachers on November 29th. In Hobart, CAA held a referendum on the arms trade. Meanwhile, others in small towns and cities such as Alice Springs and Darwin took part in lobbying and letter writing activities or raised money so that people from their communities could attend the Canberra protest.

# AIDEX '91



## MONDAY 18TH - FRIDAY 22ND NOVEMBER

Picket lines are set up at various gates at the NATEX site by a small number of protesters plus some members of the BWIU. The campsite is established across the road from NATEX. Some protesters sleep there and at the gates to prevent the entry of trucks carrying displays and equipment. The pickets are joined by increasing numbers of protesters over the coming days.

A few trucks cross the picket line early on the Thursday morning and one protester is arrested. A small number of protesters attend his court case later in the day. Friday sees picketing continue as numbers slowly dribble in from interstate.

"Early on, before AIDEX began, Shell Gate [located off Northborne Avenue and named after a nearby petrol station] was a priority because they were trying to bring in a lot of equipment through there. In the day there were some unionists, but the main contingent picketing around the clock were punks and street kids from Canberra. Everything was still in the set up phase and we didn't have enough people to stop the trucks getting in, but we made it hard for them.

They couldn't get union labour to cross the picket line so they brought in scabs. Late one night we got an emergency call telling everyone to get down to the picket because some drunken scabs from earlier in the day had returned to the site. I wound up having a very long and intense discussion with one of the scabs who was a Vietnam Veteran. I helped him to understand that we were there because we believed what he said he'd been through. I got him to talk about what it was like to be in Vietnam and asked him if he wanted anyone else to go through that. They were scabs and they were doing the wrong thing, but we reached out to the humanity in them and averted what could have been a very scary scene."

**FLICK RUBY, Interview, September 2008**

From the early days of the protest a number of high school students from SWOW and other schools take part in the picketing, often joining others in sleeping overnight. Despite their age they receive much of the same treatment from police as the adult protesters.

"In its prime there was a lot of spirit and political awareness at SWOW. Word went through the school that the protest was going to happen and I reckon about half the school was there. If you were over 15 you were allowed to sign yourself in and out and if you didn't go to class you pretty much failed on your own behalf. There were about 60 kids from SWOW at AIDEX plus kids from three other schools- one government run alternative school and two others that put a lot of energy into creative arts and drama.

Lots of kids from SWOW were injured, particularly by the young policemen who couldn't control their tempers in the heat and who would charge them. A few people had burns from where the police had taken chunks out of their chests with whatever gloves they were handling them with."

**SAM LORD, Radio 3CR, December 2008**



## SATURDAY 23RD NOVEMBER

Hundreds gather at Parliament House for a rally at 9am before taking part in a loud and raucous march to NATEX from 11am. Led by a huge arm holding a placard reading 'Stop Arms For Export', marchers also display banners reading 'AIDEX Products= Genocide of East Timorese', 'Ratbags and Extremists Against Arms Sales', 'Farms Not Arms', 'Shut Down the Military-Industrial Complex' and 'Women Need Water Not Weapons'. Amidst continual chanting and drumming in the 30 degree heat, the march stops on a number of occasions, once on the bridge above Lake Burley Griffin and once outside "Death Row", a collection of multinational companies. During the 11-kilometer trek there is some aggressive policing and one police car comes close to hitting those at the rear of the march.

"There were a few hundred people on the march and it just got bigger from that point on. The diversity of people was amazing. You had nuns and priests, medical professionals, anarchists, musicians, street theatre groups, all the different socialist groups, the NVDAers, ferals, community lawyers and workers, women's groups, etc. It was like the refugee campaign in the 2000s in that it involved every part of the social justice movement and not just the hard core political types. There were also lots of locals who opened up their houses so you could have a shower or who ferried people to hospital or whatever."

**"DELILAH", Interview, August 2008**

"It's an amazing turn out. It's unusual to come to a demo in Canberra and not know everyone there (laughter)."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE, Radio 3CR, November 23 1991**

"Those first few hours gave a glimpse of what the entire week was to be like. The police harassed marchers all along the route, shoving people off the road, screaming abuse at them and knocking them down with motorbikes. But we refused to be intimidated."

**INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANISATION, 'The Lessons Of AIDEX', ISO, 1992**

By 3pm the march reaches the NATEX site. Finding it poorly secured, those at the front rush through the gates before being escorted out by the small number of police present. One protester who climbs under a fence is roughed up and physically thrown off the site by police. Despite having already erected barriers and locked the gates, NATEX management quickly moves to post extra security guards.

Speeches are heard declaring "AIDEX officially closed" before the 500 or so people present join the already existing picket lines. With up to seven gates and seven kilometers of fencing to be covered, the sheer size of the NATEX site poses a major challenge to those blockading it.

As the afternoon continues the protesters primarily congregate around three gates on Flemington Road and Northborne Avenue, although people also block other gates at the rear of the site. Having discovered that a number of trucks had already entered the site during the march, some protesters begin dragging material in front of the gates, but for the most part the entrances are just blocked



with human bodies. Although the behaviour of the police during the march and at the pickets had already concerned many, an incident at Shell Gate soon sets the tone for much of what is to come during the rest of the week.

"Pretty much from the point the march ended, it was on. The site was constantly charged with fear and tension until the end of the protest."

**"DELILAH", Interview, September 2008**

"The police began removing the barricades and preparing to move a truck out. The protesters sat on the road attempting to prevent the exit of the truck. Two people were arrested for obstruction and five taken to hospital in what was a quite violent affair."

**3CR PRESENTER, Radio 3CR, November 23 1991**

"It was a peaceful protest with people just blockading when the police began removing people in an unrestrained, violent manner. The protesters resisted non-violently by linking arms, but there was violence on all sides from the police. I saw a young pregnant woman crashed into the ground in front of me with the force of an Ian Roberts' tackle. It was absolutely outrageous, the worst violence I've ever encountered... The truck driver nearly ran over several protesters; two of the police were hit by the truck itself. It was unrestrained, Rambo type tactics by the police. There were several protesters injured and an ambulance came at one point. Nearly everyone is missing some skin due to the rough house tactics of the Federal police."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE, Radio 3CR, November 23 1991**

"In one of the police attempts to move the protesters on they tipped over a recycling bin and then forced people through the broken glass on the road. A lot of people got badly hurt."

**FLICK RUBY, Interview, September 2008**

"I'd been involved in street theatre and was getting changed in my tent when the word went out about Shell Gate being attacked. Everyone jumped onto minibuses and bikes or ran down to the gate. I did too, but in the rush I forgot to put my shoes on.

I arrived just as the truck was pulling out. People were diving out of the way because the driver was not going to stop. Some recycling bins had been tipped over, reportedly by the police, and there was broken glass everywhere.

The police had forced the gate open to let a truck through and we didn't want it to close again because people were talking about going into the grounds. I was sandwiched in with a load of other people who were holding onto the gate when the police rammed us. A bunch of people dropped off and then the police wrenched the gate forward and we got dragged through all the broken glass. That cut through muscles in the soles of my feet and I was on crutches for the rest of the protest. There were many others who were hurt at that time too.

That was one of the first incidents in which the police really hurt a lot of people and it set the dynamic for the rest of the protest. Several people were taken to hospital. I don't know whether the police just over reacted to a silly

little skirmish or whether they were going in hard to test us out and send a message. After that people decided to really militantly lock down Shell Gate.”

**“DELILAH”, Interview, September 2008**

A similar incident at another gate on Flemington Road sees a yellow car ram into picketers sitting on the road. The police violently clear the picket, allowing the car onto the site, but no arrests are made.

“At one point we had our arms locked peacefully blocking the Main Gate when a worker drove a car at us. He pinned the person next to me to the gate. The police only intervened when we went for the driver to stop him from doing any more damage. They pushed us back and let the guy through. They should have arrested him for assault, but we were the ones they assaulted instead.”

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

Following these incidents and an aborted mass meeting, the protest splits into three tendencies, each gathering at a different gate and using different blockading tactics. One gate on Flemington Road, dubbed the Racecourse or Horse Gate, is picketed by protesters adhering to NVDA principles and tactics. People lie down on the road in star formation whilst others negotiate with drivers attempting to enter the site. Locals tending their horses or attending a horse and dog show are only allowed through this gate after their vehicles have been checked.

“There were murmurings of large truckloads of equipment arriving soon. While four-fifths of the people sat down to make a democratic decision about what to do next, one fifth decided actually to make the decision and began setting up barricades of metal junk. I was afraid of these as I considered their components as possible projectiles.

At this stage we heard that there was another gate unstaffed. Immediately, some members of our affinity group offered to go and set up a people’s blockade of this gate, without barricades, and at 6 p.m. a group of nineteen women and two(!) men had decided to put into effect the ‘star’ blockade where activists lay on the road in clusters of four or five. The Perseverance Affinity Group had actually preplanned this action in Melbourne.”

**MARGARET PESTORIUS, Nonviolence Today # 25, Mar/April 1992**

“I was part of the ‘Perseverance Affinity Group’ which was named after the pub in Fitzroy where we held our first meeting. It was an apt name in light of the intense, 24 hour a day physical blockading we ended up enduring up at AIDEX...

We were a bunch of 12 or so young 20-something activists from Melbourne Rainforest Action Group, women’s peace networks and other groups, mostly women from memory. We met and planned logistics, transport and a few ideas for blockades. Most of us had trained, worked and been arrested together at some stage over the past two years. There were a few in the group from memory who were less experienced in terms of direct action, but I think all of us had at least some.

We had a general commitment to nonviolence. We might have practiced what we called ‘Star blockades’ at some stage, a physical blockading tactic designed

to blockade a roadway or entrance that we first tried at some nonviolence training. This involved a small group laying face to face in a circle with arms tightly linked. It provided more stability and resistance to being moved than a line of sitting people does and also allowed face to face contact (support) as people were being pulled apart. It was actually one of the main blockade techniques we used at the Horse gate, particularly on the first few days when numbers were low and we only had a few people at the gate."

**ANTHONY KELLY, Interview, August 2008**

"There was an equestrian event on at one end of the NATEX grounds and we had a commitment to allowing access to the people involved with that event. At the same time we would not allow people or cars associated with AIDEX through. During the course of the day we turned away 50 to 150 AIDEX-associated cars and trucks... It is a probability that some workers entered this gate early in the morning in horse-floats, but this quickly ceased as we started looking for evidence of horses!

Some activists would lie in star formation on the road, while others formed a standing blockade across the gateway. The stopped car would be checked by two others. It was clear that very good communication skills were imperative in this liaison role as there was always the possibility that an overly defensive or angry driver would step on the accelerator. This happened early on with a large truck which continued to move forward as a frightened activist yelled at the driver instead of making him aware that there were people under his wheels. The commitment and courage of the people lying on the road was inspiring.

The star blockaders were also endangered by the continual procession of activists who would come down to this gate to see what was going on. They often stood in front of blockaders sitting or lying on the road thus obstructing the driver's view of them. Those, who were actually in danger, were cynically treated by other activists who were repeatedly asked to keep the road and corners clear. This sort of peacekeeping, designed simply to lower the risk of physical harm to activists, dominated our role at AIDEX and was quickly exhausting.

For most of the Saturday night and through the long, hot Sunday the dynamics of actions at this gate were quite different from the other gates. There was an excited, cooperative feeling as quite large numbers of people made decisions together about what to do and how. People taking the significant risk of lying in a star got to know each of the members of her or his own star and we felt the amiable affinity of people doing a good job. The organisation and discipline, however, was not consistently good and often I found myself thinking that it was too dangerous. It was, however, the most effective way of stopping access."

**MARGARET PESTORIUS, Nonviolence Today # 25, Mar/April 1992**

"We had this strategy of lying down on the road so that cars couldn't drive in and we would link our arms to form a star shape of about five or six people and be lying face-down on the bitumen. So I'd have police dogs barking in my ears, it was really scary and threatening. People wouldn't just be removed, they would be dragged across the bitumen..."

**SHANE GUTHRIE, Stepping Out For Peace, PND, 2004**



NVDA action at the Racecourse Gate (Leo Bild)



Early blockade of the Main Gate (Leo Bild)

"The chaos factor was huge. I don't remember much about the camp site across the road from the NATEX site or food or my tent, in fact I have no memory of sleeping, but I guess I did. My focus was on the site itself and the burning priority was stopping everything from getting in.

It was 24 hours blockade [at the Horse gate] from the very start which meant we tried to set up rough shifts, sleeping on the grass besides the road, to give each other breaks. The Perseverance crew were the core at the gate, dozens of others simply joined us and started working with us. We would welcome and brief people and worked out as much of a system as possible...

Most vehicles were related to the horse event, but many weren't. Over the first few days we stopped dozens of AIDEX vehicles, some were obvious with company logos on the side and other drivers simply told us where they were heading. A few got mad and tried to cross the blockade, but we basically stopped them all. Most of the horse related vehicles were obvious too as they had horses, or logos or passes to the horse event that drivers duly showed us. We literally stopped, checked and blockaded hundreds of vehicles.

AIDEX vehicles were not getting much instruction. Some had simply driven up and tried various gates and were now trying ours. Not even briefing or instructing delivery drivers showed how unprepared the exhibition organisers had been for a total blockade.

Some criticism that I remember hearing of us at the Horse gate was that it was a weak link. It didn't have stuff blocking it basically and from time to time there were calls for stuff to be put across the road. In true strategic nonviolence fashion we argued against that as it would alienate a third party and force us to also block a major Canberra sporting event. The horse thing, whatever it was, was a national event and it would have disrupted thousands of people to have stopped horse floats getting in. It might not have been a vital consideration, but at the time it seemed important.

Besides that, it was working. We were stopping vehicles effectively, turning them away each time. No vehicles got through our gate for those first few days whilst I was there in my memory."

**ANTHONY KELLY, Interview, August 2008**

Following the earlier breaching of Shell Gate, this more isolated area is picketed in a militant and confrontational style. Barricades are set up, metal pickets are forced into the ground and the gates are wired shut. A car body is dumped out the front and set on fire at one point and campfires are set up to keep those sleeping overnight warm. When the Fire Brigade is called out to douse the fires, they refuse to do so, much to the joy of the picketers.

"At the Shell Gate they were thwarted by the positioning of some lovely fifty gallon drums with fires inside. The Fire Brigade were called out, but when they turned up they asked if the fire was being maintained and when people said 'Yes' they left and didn't come back again. Everyone cheered...

I got my bedding confiscated at one stage when I was sleeping outside the gate. To get it back you had to go and talk to the police which no one particularly wanted to do."

**SAM LORD, Radio 3CR, December 2007**



A third gate (dubbed the Middle or Main Gate), located on Flemington Road and closer to Northborne Avenue than the Horse Gate, is picketed. People link arms and dump a 40 seater bus and metal and wood off-cuts in front of the gate. This blockade generally attracts those who are unwilling to conform to the NVDA principles, but who do not fit in with the more confrontational picket at Shell Gate. Over the coming days, many protesters also wander from one gate to another depending on what is happening at each.

“At the Main Gate there was huge debate about tactics, how long we could maintain what we were doing, how to deescalate the police violence, etc. There wasn’t much debate on Shell Gate or the Racecourse Gate because they knew exactly what they wanted to do. Everyone who didn’t fit in with those wound up in the middle. It was right across from the camp site so a lot of people congregated there locking arms or sitting on the road.”

**“DELILAH”, Interview, August 2008**

“There were always different things going on all the time so the police didn’t really know what we were going to do next, which I thought was very effective.”

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE A, Radio Skid Row, December 1992**

“It was nice that there were different levels of action happening and that there was a dis-unified response going on.”

**MALE INTERVIEWEE D, Radio Skid Row, December 1992**

Whilst the three pickets allow the majority of protesters to separate and carry out blockading in their preferred way, disagreements nevertheless break out over tactics. Some see the NVDA gate as a “weak point” in the blockade whilst others label the other two gates the “male blockade” despite the presence of women at all three. These debates, which echo wider differences about tactics and the causes of police violence, continue throughout the rest of the protest and beyond.

“Although there were people amongst the protesters who were provocative, I can’t help feeling that the police were to a great degree at fault. Right from the start of the weekend we had a picket line, a very successful picket line I might add, that was stopping vehicles from coming in to the race track for a pony show. We were stopping all the vehicles and asking politely what they were doing and if they seemed legitimate we let them through. Other people who were suspect we didn’t let through and some of them were blatantly obvious because they were so aggressive. Some of these people began ramming the crowd and the police were turning a blind eye to people’s injuries. One can’t help but think, ‘What the hell is going on here? These police are blatantly out to injure us, they’re not there to protect us, they’re not there to communicate with us, they’re not there to see that we play by the rules’.”

**MALE INTERVIEWEE B, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

“Many people got involved in many different actions and that was very important. Much concern was given to non-violent action which was our aim,

but in reality with so many people with different views on how to go about doing things this [didn't] always happen. [However] very little violence from protesters eventuated."

**JOHN RENSHAW, 'Evaluation of the Anti-AIDEX Campaign', Self Published Report, December 1991**

"Some protesters naturally reacted very badly and you'd see individual protesters and cops egging each other on in their own little individual struggles. Overall though I thought most of the protesters' reaction was to focus on rescuing other people. I remember whole days where you'd just focus on looking after people because the potential for violence was really great and you didn't want it to escalate any further. Most people I know who were there remember it as the first really violent demo they went to."

**LAURA MACFARLANE, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

"Many of us in the Perseverance Affinity Group were used to police violence – from East Timor solidarity work – the Gulf war, Nurrungar etc. But it was still shocking. Our affinity group didn't really hold together at all after a few days though. I didn't at all have a sense of how important support from an affinity group could be and was more often running around and doing my own thing than sticking with and supporting or being supported by my group...

As per usual there was an array of conceptions and misconceptions about nonviolence, activist behaviour and activist responses to police. Calls for less violence and abuse toward the police from activists at the large meetings were interpreted, in some circumstance rightly so, as attempts to control others. In other cases, activists who did go hard on cops did little but rile them up and make greater levels of violence against other activists more likely. The few debates I heard at any of the mass meetings were far more frustrating than influential in any way. Most people I knew felt similarly.

There was a spectrum of nonviolent activists at the protest –from the principled/pacifists who took largely symbolic stances and had problems with the direct intervention to those of us who engaged in direct action and intervention. There were tones of activists who did not understand this distinction and railed against any nonviolence as 'pacifism'. I remember after having just stopped a truck (early on) some activist running up to me and calling me a 'bloody Christian' (which I'm not) – as if somehow all people at that gate were Christian. I just yelled back at him.

Another activist in the ISO I knew came up to me afterwards and said, 'You know I thought nonviolence was all about marching on the streets. I never realized you guys actually blockaded things.' Misconceptions like this between tendencies were everywhere.

As usual some cops were brutal and callous, some just scared and out of their depth, but they certainly had the monopoly on the use of force and they often applied it brutally. Injuries were overwhelmingly suffered on our side...

The police were totally under prepared and the strength of the initial blockade certainly forced them into having to use greater levels of force to try and dislodge us or move trucks in etc. The level of resistance from activists to the police movements was extraordinary and incredibly courageous. Fuelled



perhaps by the emotional impact of both the war in Iraq and the massacre in Dili as well as the pure and simple fact that these necrophiliac bastards were warmongers and nothing short of shutting them down was acceptable.

Of course there was plenty of agro and abuse hurled at every cop to rile them up and set up a toxic antagonism for the whole event. Every cop was copping vitriolic abuse from activists. Not to say it wasn't deserved in some cases, but strategically and practically it just meant that we had to deal with particularly agro cops all the time.

Having said that, it was the actual act of blockading the gates, not the abuse from activists that meant that use of such force was inevitable. Despite the fact that we should expect a violent response when we physically get in the way of state militarist infrastructure, some activists were more emotionally prepared for the violence than others...

Several if not most of us in the Perseverance affinity group were injured, one taken to hospital. I was bitten on the leg by a police dog, given full leash on me whilst I was sitting cross legged on the road. And all within an affinity group committed to nonviolence and not aggressive or abusing to cops at all. It was part of the overall culture and context of the action that police violence did not distinguish [between different kinds of activists]."

**ANTHONY KELLY, Interview, August 2008**

"The ISO tended to hang back and encourage the younger and more inexperienced amongst the protesters to rush the police lines which saw a lot of people get hurt. After AIDEX they threw a celebration in Sydney and I was amazed to hear their members talking about how the protesters had scored a victory over the police. We certainly defeated the AIDEX organizers, but we didn't beat the police, we got absolutely smashed by them."

**DENNIS DOHERTY, INTERVIEW, AUGUST 2008**

"There were people who did argue that our side provoked the violence. At the nightly meeting on the Saturday before AIDEX opened, some speakers attacked people for chanting angrily and swearing at the police and said that only people who accepted a strategy of absolute nonviolence should be allowed to stay. International Socialist Organisation (ISO) members pointed out that this would split those who were opposed to AIDEX and we should attempt activities that could involve all of us.

On one picket line there was a two-hour discussion on the role of the police in society after a police car was let through the line. Some people argued that police can act for us or against us depending on the circumstances. This meant we should try to stop the police only when they escorted AIDEX cars. Socialists argued that the position of the police in society means they will always be on the other side and that we should attempt to block them as much as possible."

**INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANISATION, 'The Lessons Of AIDEX', ISO, 1992**

"Robert Burrowes' views on NVDA were very influential in Melbourne at that time and a number of the affinity groups that went from Melbourne followed his line. What I found frustrating was that whilst they talked about consensus decision making, their definition of NVDA seemed to exclude all other ideas around non violence. I consider myself a non violent person, I would much

rather talk than fight. However it seemed unless I was willing to lay down in a star formation and have my head smashed in I was considered violent. I felt that the idea some people advocated that to actively resist being dragged away from a picket line was a form of violence in itself was just ridiculous.

In some ways I felt that individuals in some NVDA groups were participating in someone else's social experiment. They were so absolute in the way things had to be done and I wasn't surprised when reality failed to measure up to theory and many of them got hurt. I was upset about it, but not surprised."

**"DELILAH", Interview, August 2008**

"Back in Adelaide [after the protest] and determined to analyse how the violence started, I viewed a video of the early demonstration. I noticed how several demonstrators taunted the Operations Support Group. This verbal violence against police continued throughout the demonstration. While the police had difficulty substantiating claims of protester violence, the media had no problem catching a flow of verbal abuse towards the police.

Without doubt, the police at AIDEX were extremely violent. But it is our job to be the peace movement and set examples to the police and the community. In this way we can influence public opinion."

**CHRIS HANNAFORD, 'Defeat From The Jaws Of Victory', Green Left Weekly, 26 February 1992**

"I wouldn't say that I and many others were particularly calm in our reaction to [the police violence]. I certainly baited the police at times and took part in endlessly questioning them about what they were doing there and why they were defending the rights of arms dealers to sell bombs and kill people. After a while I realised that this was counterproductive and that whilst it made me feel good in the short term it just egged them on to hit us harder.

Despite some of us being verbally aggressive and resisting being moved on, any violence against the police that I saw was generally reactionary, as in the case of a friend who was knocked out after she kicked a cop to stop him choking a woman half to death. The feeling against the police definitely got more intense after the first few days as by this point pretty much everyone had endured some punishment at their hands. Even people who had advocated a friendly approach at the beginning became openly hostile and more likely to strike back."

**"CHRIS", Interview, August 2008**

"I agree there were those present whose attention seemed more focused on the police than on AIDEX: holders of the 'bash on the head theory of radicalisation.' They reduce the state to its most basic element (the police) and believe that by fighting the cops they are 'confronting' the state, regardless of the situation. From this, they conclude that by getting hit by the cops you naturally radicalise and develop an instant understanding of the state.

These people certainly didn't help, but they weren't the cause of the police violence. It was clear a decision had been made to contain this demo with maximum permissible force, taking into account the political ramifications."

**RAY FULCHER, Letter, Green Left Weekly, 25 March 1992**

"I saw lots of people who had a really hard pacifist line, but when something went down they totally freaked out. There were so many ideological tendencies and when the heat goes up you see how people's ideas really relate to their practices. People can say lots of things, but when a semi-trailer comes flying through your picket and nearly knocks down 20 people it sorts the wheat from the chaff quite quickly in terms of what do you do, how do you do it, etc."

**COLM MCNAUGHTON, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

"At AIDEX, I saw some goading of police by some politically immature ideological anti-authoritarians and, probably, some ASIO provocateurs. But to say that this minuscule number of protesters provoked the pacifist police onto their orgy of violence is like saying that the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq so offended peace-loving US imperialism that its bombers just had to go in and lay waste to the human and natural landscape of Iraq."

**PHIL SHANNON, Letter, Green Left Weekly, 29 April 1992**

"In the immediate run up to AIDEX there was a police equipment exhibition held. At that time there was a scramble going on in the arms industry because the Cold War had ended and they were desperately looking for where their post Cold War profits were going to come from. Police weapons and non lethal technology has since become a huge industry. I think that that exhibition had a major influence on the AFP's later behaviour as there had been a huge influx into Canberra of policing experts from other countries, in particular the United States.

The other major factor was that the Federal and ACT governments were embarrassed by all these foreign dignitaries and corporations coming to Canberra and not being able to get into NATEX. I'm convinced that the word came down to snuff this thing out and that it was political expediency that drove the police violence rather than individual police just going in hard for the sake of it. The violence was designed to achieve a result and that was to alleviate the embarrassment that the government was feeling because they weren't in control of their facilities."

**FLICK RUBY, Interview, September 2008**

"The label 'terrorist', and similar militarized descriptions such as 'guerilla groups' were freely applied to the AIDEX protesters by the AFP, which was in charge of policing AIDEX. As documents just released under Freedom of Information (FOI) concerning AIDEX reveal, 'terrorist' was also used to label particular demonstrators who drew the hostile attention of the police...

The documents released under FOI include a frank and lengthy interview with Detective Superintendent Colin Rowley, who was the AFP forward commander at AIDEX. These documents reveal clearly the influence of militarized counter-terrorist policing at AIDEX. Rowley lists a military background amongst his qualifications for commanding the AIDEX operation and claims extensive experience of demonstrators. However, little of this experience appears to have been gained in Australia or in countries tolerant of political protest.

Rowley comments 'I had my first demonstration experience overseas

where in my first demonstration there were 500 killed. I was in the military and I was in Singapore in 1963 and I was working with the Ghurka(s)... there were 500 killed in that demonstration and through the several years I was overseas, I had a number of experiences with confrontation situations with demonstrators.'

Further responses reveal that Rowley is a counter-terrorist specialist with many years experience as a Special Operations Training commander, and a current posting to the counter-terrorist summit organization SAC-PAV.

The kindest interpretation once could place on the AIDEX events as revealed by the interview record is that the officer placed in command of this major demonstration was out of touch with the customs and active techniques of non-violent protest in Australia... Rowley stresses that he expected the demonstrators to be 'passive, passive, passive' and to sit or lie down on the road as a 'human mat.'

Rowley admits that he and his force had planned and trained for no other eventuality that this imaginary 'passive protest' scenario, and were totally unprepared for the numbers and the sophistication and active, non-violent techniques protesters now regularly adopt...

Police numbers were therefore inadequate to meet to meet the challenges that these techniques posed. On the Saturday, when it began to look as if the demonstrators might overrun the site and achieve their objective of blockading entrance to the arms fair in the NATEX building, there appeared to be something close to panic in senior AFP ranks. Extra untrained police had to be called in at short notice and a completely new approach was adopted. Faced with what they defined as failure, the police adopted a brutal and threatening stance against all protesters, including peace and compliant protesters... The change of tactics [on behalf of the police from the Saturday onwards] and the indiscriminate use of pain compliance holds and excessive force outraged even experience protesters and alienated what had been, until then, on the Superintendents own admission, an 'amiable and amenable crowd.'

The AIDEX confrontation was a chilling demonstration of the possibilities for repression of dissent in Australia, indicating the extent of the militarization of police and security organisations, especially the AFP, and the collusion of the media, and of political figures and institutions. It showed the AFP to be powerful, militarized, unaccountable, and politically hostile to dissent."

**VAL PLUMWOOD and SEAN KENAN, 'Military Displays', Arena Magazine, February-March 1994**

As the day continues, a large number of police are brought in and trucks attempt to enter the site, but only a small number are able to do so. In one incident at a back gate located in the remote area behind NATEX, a small number of protesters are injured and two sent to hospital. By the evening, the setting up of the Flemington Road campsite is completed with food, medical and toilet facilities made available for the protest.

"When I arrived I was quite surprised to find how organised everything was in the camp. There were food tents and everything was quite communal, not scattered here and there... I noticed there was an organic food company from

Canberra who donated food and just left it in camp for whoever needed it."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE D, Radio Skid Row, December 1992**

"People put whatever they could afford in for food. Despite the regular insult of 'Why don't you get a job?' a lot of us were working and took time off work to attend. We were able to put in more money to help cover those who couldn't afford so much."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE E, Radio Skid Row, December 1992**

"Having the campsite directly across from where we were picketing was a real coup. Although it got annoying running across the road every time a rumour went out it provided a definite advantage for us. At the same time it got pretty intense because you spent the entire week immersed in the protest. You'd wake up, scoff down some food and be straight into it until you fell asleep that night."

**"CHRIS", Interview, July 2008**

"There were things constantly going on and I learnt, especially later, that you don't always react. You were living on heightened nervous energy for a week or more and that's a real drain on the body. With all the paranoia and rumours you just had to be calm. People were constantly saying that the police were going to raid the camp, and they eventually did, but the amount of times people said they were going to raid was vastly different (laughter)."

**COLM MCNAUGHTON, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

The campsite also serves as a place for holding mass meetings in the mornings and evenings. These have not been previously planned for and proceed with mixed success. Differences in opinions over tactics and whether the camp should engage in mass or affinity group based actions often result in arguments that last for hours. Allegations of factions attempting to manipulate the meetings further muddy the waters as do the presence of rumours and the lack of coordinated communication between gates.

The meetings are rarely able to generate decisions and are often broken up as events on the ground take precedence. Nevertheless, despite the lack of mandated direction the majority of protesters are able to overcome these factors and continue to effectively blockade by gravitating towards whichever piece of action they see fit.

"The evening meetings fluctuated in size. There were meetings going on all over and some of those sent representatives to the main meeting to tell about what their group had decided."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE F, Radio Skid Row, December 1992**

"Some of the meetings I went to would start with general feedback on what had happened and had a look at the strategy of that day and a lot of feedback on injuries as well... There was a lot of debate on nonviolence."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE G, Radio Skid Row, December 1992**

"A lot of groups were advocating not doing anything. Not talking to the police, not chanting, not singing unless it was something very positive, sitting on the

side of the road, away from the police, away from the action. A lot of people weren't happy with that because they felt that wasn't doing enough. I'm not saying those people wanted to be violent, they wanted to be part of a more active peaceful demonstration. There were also some factions who wanted to be more confrontational and more active in all areas. Most of the time there was a lot of debate going on and a few people getting angry..."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE D, Radio Skid Row, December 1992**

"I've organized and attended many of these mass protests and blockades and they are never smooth operations. They all descend into hours and hours of interminable discussion. Everybody comes from a different viewpoint and few people are prepared to say 'We'll do it your way today and maybe I'll get my way tomorrow.' Most people want it done their way and it takes an enormous time to come to an agreement.

Given all that however AIDEX '91 was particularly bad in this respect. I think RAAF bear some responsibility because there could have been more thought and planning put into the communication and decision making structures. I think there was a need for an organizing committee and an information clearinghouse and there was no such thing.

Because there was a vacuum it allowed a group like the ISO to dominate the incoherent and interminable community meetings that did happen. Because they had little or nothing to do with the organizing of the protest they arrived with plenty of energy and brought along megaphones and their own marquee. It was a classic piece of ambush marketing where they took an issue and turned it to their benefit for the sake of recruiting. With their discipline they easily took over the running of the meetings whereas normally you would have had a different group from a different place doing that each day. Since they were the most organized faction they were able to have a much bigger influence than their numbers would or should have otherwise allowed.

Nevertheless it's easy to be wise after the event. We didn't envisage that the police would be so rough and the media so negative. People were under enormous pressure and a lack of any form of decision making structure meant that our reaction to the police was sporadic and disorganized."

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

"I did not enjoy having individuals control the demonstration because they had the power of the megaphone, the walkie talkie or the loudest voice."

**LOUISE MACDONALD, 'How Was AIDEX?', Chain Reaction #65, March 1992**

"In the meetings you didn't get anyone saying anything really crazy like 'Let's be violent' because they never would have gotten enough people behind them. Whatever they were proposing they needed some level of unity."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE H, Radio Skid Row, December 1992**

"There was a lot of discussion of tactics, and I think that when we have such a broad range of people with different approaches it's very important to be democratic and respect all views. That didn't always happen, particularly with those who pursued deliberately divisive tactic such as calling for walkouts from democratic meetings in the belief that this would 'distil a militant minority.'"

**DAVE WRIGHT, 'A Training Ground For Police Violence', Green Left Weekly, 4 December 1992**

"One morning one of the ultra hippies suggested we all spend the day meditating for peace and on another a feral answered the po-faced question of 'Why are we here?' with 'We're here to party!'"

**"CHRIS", Interview, May 2008**

"We didn't want to impose a centralized structure upon the protest so we didn't put much energy into making camp meetings happen. There was an assumption that there would be too many people for that to practically work. We were definitely conscious of the facility being large, and thought that folks would congregate around a particular gate without moving too much if the blockade was going to be effective.

There was a lot 'it just happened'-ness about AIDEX. There was also so much we couldn't predict. I remember the buses started rolling in and it just began. There was so much to do; there wasn't really enough time to have a strategy as such in the end except to 'hold the line.' There was also a consciousness that we were under so much surveillance that any decision making structure would be thwarted if it wasn't quite spontaneous. Again, nothing could be predicted about how it would go really. I have that strong feeling and memory that there was too much we didn't know, but we knew the gates, the dates and that enough people could stop it."

**FLICK RUBY, Interview, September 2008**

"Looking back it was essentially too chaotic to allow sound or democratic processes to develop during the action. A lack of structural planning around decision-making (a hallmark of the Jacob Grech School of organising, with respect) meant that it was almost impossible to have anything even resembling democratic decision-making at AIDEX in 1991.

The mass meetings were like an irrelevant counterpoint to the ongoing decision-making that was occurring within and between blockades and affinity groups throughout the week. Small groups of people were deciding to do something here or there, runners between gates alerting others to a police incursion or push which people then responded to.

All this small scale, often spontaneous, decision making was largely invisible and happening totally without any overall coordination or control. This was both a strong point of the blockade as it allowed groups and individuals to just do what made sense at the time and a weakness as it was near on impossible to have overall coordination of gaps and responses to the changing police strategies.

I got lots of support from others when I was attacked by the dog. I remember being carried away to first aid which was like a MASH unit. So there were larger systems of support around than just affinity groups but again, these were largely invisible and not clearly coordinated...

Overall the blockade held so the decentralized and ad-hoc approach worked as well as could be expected under the circumstances."

**ANTHONY KELLY, Interview, August 2008**



"I don't know what practical alternative there could have been to the big meetings because even if half the people walked off telling each other to get fucked there still needed to be some sharing of information, some coming together. Meetings during these sort of protests are always fraught with difficulties and are seldom seen by everyone as being successful. Some people tried to take it in the direction where different affinity groups and organisations could just have delegates speak, but there were a lot of people there who weren't from any particular group. Also I don't think anyone quite expected the protest to be as big as it was. Having so many people with so many different ideas there made it quite uncontrollable."

**"DELILAH", Interview, August 2008**

"The meetings were quite factionalised along predictable lines and there was a lot of debate, which could be quite intellectually exciting in terms of moving ideas around forms of protest forward. Ultimately though, it was an amazing exercise in all these groups coming together. The fact that it was a disparate site with a number of entrances and rolling actions meant that there was enough space for everyone to engage in the kind of tactics that seemed appropriate to them. At the same time there was a unity of purpose that gave everyone a sense of esprit de corps. There was a great deal of solidarity between people there.

Much of the conflict was between the NVDA people and the ISO. Although they by no means represented the majority of people there, they were loud (and organised) voices at the time and afterwards within the peace movement. They had their positions set way before AIDEX and were part of national and international movements with relatively fixed ideas. The fact that much of the material produced following AIDEX reflected their views and their complaints was no surprise.

The strength of AIDEX however was that it could include such divergent points of view within a relatively unified protest. You could look at someone on a picket line and they would smile regardless of whether they might go limp or fight back when the police came to cart you away. Having a breadth and diversity of action made the protest sustainable in that it allowed you to go off and do street theatre or something else if you were exhausted from blockading."

**SUSAN LUCKMAN, Interview, August 2008**

November 23rd saw the AIDEX '91 protest hit the national media with reports carried on all the evening TV news programmes and in most newspapers the following day. From the outset the majority of the reporting around AIDEX '91 reflected the usual mainstream media treatment of protests in Australia. As a general rule protester numbers and effectiveness were understated. Any activity that went beyond the purely symbolic was treated as aberrant with little or no attempt made to look at the reasons why protesters might have chosen to do more than just wave placards. Clashes and conflicts with authorities, no matter how small a part of the overall protest, received the majority of coverage as did protesters who had an "alternative" appearance. In keeping with their respect for the dominant institutions in Australian society, journalists generally reported

assertions from the police, business and major political parties as facts whilst statements from protesters and their supporters were treated as allegations.

The Canberra Times newspaper was the main offender in this regard and as the only major newspaper in the ACT, its reporting proved highly damaging to the protest. During its extensive coverage it carried six items, mainly profiles of individuals, that could be described as relatively positive and another six in which statements from protesters were given equal weight to those of their critics. However the remaining 26 items, most of which were printed once the picketing had begun in earnest, were extremely critical. The blockade was repeatedly described in militaristic terms as a 'war', and the term "peace protest" was derisively displayed in inverted commas. The protesters themselves were regularly described by journalists and the sources they quoted as "hooligans", "extremists", "rent-a-crowd", "professional picketers", "proclaimed peace protesters" and "thugs" whilst their behaviour was portrayed as "violent", "wild", "hypocritical" and "vicious."

Despite only sustaining 27 reported injuries over 12 days, most of them involving minor bruising or abrasions, police casualties were played up. One incident involving a policeman receiving a broken nose was reported on four separate occasions. Assertions by protesters that hundreds of demonstrators had received mild to serious injuries were either ignored, treated as allegations or placed in the context of the police having to carry out their duties in the face of "the mob."

Although the Canberra Times occasionally quoted opponents of the arms trade, the majority of its reporting uncritically carried statements from officials attacking the protesters and defending the AIDEX event. Statements by DESIKO and their business allies that the protest would cost the ACT economy between \$5 and \$10 million in lost revenues were reported on nine occasions despite there being little evidence to show that this would be the case. Calls by DESIKO spokesperson Bob Day for the introduction of a State of Emergency were treated seriously, as were his allegations that the ACT ALP were to blame for the violence. Most amazingly, the Canberra Times front page story of November 27th ran with the headline "The inside story of AIDEX: not a gun in sight", a claim that was refuted by TV footage and laughed at in The Age and Sydney Morning Herald.

What most infuriated those opposed to AIDEX however was a series of bizarre police allegations that were aired in the closing days of the protest. The Canberra Times variously reported that protesters had wielded vegetables stuffed with nails and needles, a spear gun, knives, Molotov cocktails, pieces of wood studded with nails, steel spikes and acid filled condoms. On top of this, demonstrators had supposedly laid booby traps made out of wood studded with spikes, bashed police in packs, cut the brake lines and slashed the tires of police cars, attempted to electrify NATEX's fences, covered themselves in faeces and urine, and abandoned small children on the picket lines for the police to rescue. An explanation from police that they had removed their identification badges after a policewoman was stabbed with the pin of one also went unquestioned.

Despite none of the police injuries being consistent with the use of such weapons and no one being charged with possessing or using such weapons, the police allegations were nevertheless presented as fact in both the Canberra

Times and much of the commercial news media. Similarly, a lack of footage or photos of anyone using or displaying such weapons was never questioned despite the only evidence of their existence being a motley collection of pocket knives, steel drink bottles, soiled condoms and other items that were presented at a police press conference. The Sydney Morning Herald even managed to come up with their own variation on the theme; they reported the presence of journalists from the alternative media as well as of street theatre actors mimicking the riot police, as attempts to use "false TRG overalls and media passes" to "break the police cordon."

TV news reporting followed a similar inflammatory theme. Incidents in which a minority of protesters, who whilst not brandishing knives and corrosive acid, did abuse and push police, bash on cars and resist arrest, were replayed over and over. Footage of the majority of the protesters locking arms on picket lines or sitting peacefully on the road were generally only played when they featured demonstrators being dragged away in pain by the police. Even then the power of such images was undercut by commentary and reporting that gave the impression that such treatment was required in order to restore law and order.

One of the only exceptions to the rule was much of the reporting on SBS TV, which gave relatively equal weight to police and protester assertions. The only mainstream journalist to describe the injuries sustained by the protesters in any depth or to explore their reasons for being there was The Age's Vitali Vitaliev. For his troubles he found a picture of his face with a target on it on display when he entered the AIDEX exhibition to take a look around.

"The image of us as crazed peaceniks attacking the coppers was just absolute rubbish."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE K, Skid Row Radio, December 1991**

"The media didn't reflect the diversity of the group from what I saw. It reflected the usual ratbag image. The focus was on people acting aggressively and taking it totally out of context."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE C, Skid Row Radio, December 1991**

"The police behaviour at AIDEX was a real shock because previously the presence of the media had been a restraining force. They mistreated sex workers and aborigines and street kids all the time, but beating middle class white people whilst the cameras were rolling was not the norm. Having the media present at other protests around that time ensured that the police would behave civilly, but at AIDEX that suddenly wasn't the case anymore. The media predictably enough spun it so that the protesters were responsible, but having the police clearly attacking people on TV was a real shift and necessitated the police running their own media campaign against us."

**FLICK RUBY, Interview, September 2008**

"Police documents released under Freedom of Information (FOI) show that media management was used effectively at AIDEX, where police-media liaison constantly accompanied groups of reporters and camera operators."

**VAL PLUMWOOD and SEAN KENAN, 'Military Displays', Arena Magazine, February-March 1994**

"One of the most startling memories for me was from when we were hanging out with other people from the Communist Party [then Socialist Party of Australia] and the Australian Anti-Bases Coalition (AABC). One of the Communist Party members was a very good caterer and we were sitting in the back of his truck eating fruit cake and drinking tea. A TV camera crew came past and said 'Thank God, an ordinary group of people. We're sick of all these ferals and "professional protesters.' They asked what we did for a living and one of us was a janitor, one was an accountant, one was a teacher, one was a building contractor, etc. They were delighted to find people who were, in their mind, not 'fringe', yet here we were communists and some of the main organizers of the protest. They never seemed to put that together (laughter)."

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

"I was doing sun block duty on the picket one day and people said they didn't like the chemicals, but they'd found a deposit of ochre. So they were putting ochre on their faces. The police said we were putting excrement on our faces and this got reported as a fact in the media."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE H, Skid Row Radio, December 1991**

"The media was very negative. For instance people were putting ochre on their faces instead of sun screen and that was all twisted around to being that people had put shit on their faces just to terrorise the police! Here are all these wild men and women with shit on their faces."

**JULES MCLELLAN, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

"We saw a lot of images on the news in which the police were bashing protesters, but the media tried to have it the other way."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE M, Skid Row Radio, December 1991**

"There were certainly people there willing to be militant and abuse the police and I was amongst those. A few people also lashed out at the cops too after receiving rough treatment. That was a big leap however from the image of shit smeared terrorists prowling around with knives and chucking acid in the faces of cowering police. Where was the proof of any of this? If there were loonies doing this stuff why weren't any of them charged with attempted murder or assault with a deadly weapon or even possession of a weapon? Where were the police disfigured by acid or bleeding from stab wounds? Surely that would have made the evening news had it actually have happened. From memory the best they could do was talk about some bloke jabbed with a pen and a bunch of kitchen knives and street theatre props they confiscated from the camp."

**"CHRIS", Interview, July 2008**

"Some of us were doing street theatre, dressing up as OSG, and taking the piss, just trying to take down the level of tension for both the protesters and the police. On the Wednesday we were asked by some of the cops on the line to do our piece for amusement and then a bunch of yobbo cops from inside NATEX came rushing out and grabbed our props from us. On Friday morning or Saturday the Today show on Channel Nine had the police showing these props and claiming they were weapons used against them. I rang the station to say



Waking the dead (leo Bild)



Sleeping on the job (leo Bild)

that these were props, but it was never reported.”

**MALE INTERVIEWEE K, Skid Row Radio, December 1991**

Throughout the protest, media liaison was coordinated from the Canberra Peace Centre at ANU by a small collective that included members of RAAF and the Stop AIDEX Campaign and that issued press releases and fielded calls from the media. Whilst these groups formed the dominant voice of the protest, others were encouraged to make statements, a practice that some demonstrators frowned upon.

“In 1991 when we held our media briefing and introduced the people who were doing media liaison I made the point that the journalists shouldn’t just come to me because they knew me as a Canberra activist, but should feel free to talk to anybody at the protest. If they wanted to talk to someone from RAAF or The Stop AIDEX Campaign they could talk to us, but everyone else at the protest had an equal and legitimate right to talk to the media. Normally what happens at a protest is that one or two organisers are made the spokespeople and anyone else who wants a say is muscled out.”

**JACOB GRECH, Interview, July 2008**

“Media liaison, whilst operated very well from the Canberra Peace Centre, was happening in a very ad hoc way at the AIDEX site. The lack of identifiable media liaison people at the AIDEX site made it easy for reporters to grab sensational comments from demonstrators or only talk to the police before filing their reports.”

**LOUISE MACDONALD, ‘How Was AIDEX?’, Chain Reaction #65, March 1992**

“I worked on media liaison. No one was told that they couldn’t talk to the media, but naturally enough the people in the media centre, who had phones and faxes and who were sending out press releases, had better access than others.

We were hoping to get some messages across about why people were protesting, but the media just focused on the violence and the rights and wrongs of protester behaviour, not whether or not there should be an arms fair. There was a huge amount of coverage, but the visuals rarely matched the voice-overs. It wasn’t my first experience of that, but it was the most blatant because it went on for days and days in a row.”

**“DELILAH”, Interview, August 2008**

“We did our best to make the media feel as favourable towards us as possible. We knew that we couldn’t influence the publishers or the editors, but we knew we could influence the cameramen. When you watched the news the commentary would be talking about the violent protesters, but what you saw was people sitting on the ground getting kicked by the police. During the wedding [on the Wednesday] one Channel 10 cameraman even got arrested because he refused to leave. The cops told all the media to clear out and he refused. Which meant we got no coverage on Channel 10 that night (laughter).

We had a tent set up for the media with a twelve volt fridge in it and mirrors and chairs and various beverages. We made them comfortable and got

to know them. If we knew there was going to be a good action we'd let them know beforehand. We'd then tell them that we'd watch all the news reports that night and depending on how bad they were we'd decide who would be told where and when the action would be. To some extent that worked because people wanted the scoops. For a period we cut Channel 10 right out because whilst we didn't expect super favourable reporting theirs was just appalling. This approach didn't always give us a huge amount of leverage, but it was a big improvement on the usual relationship where activists were chasing the media and shaping their actions purely around what the media wanted."

**JACOB GRECH, Interview, July 2008**

"We didn't have a clear media strategy in the way that people now think about manipulating the media. We didn't have a media machine like Greenpeace did, but we had clear messages and we made enough of a splash for the media to come to us."

**FLICK RUBY, Interview, September 2008**

Whilst few amongst the protesters took the media coverage seriously, it nevertheless did have a damaging effect in terms of undermining their cause and justifying the heavy handed approach of the police. Many also found themselves under attack from relatives, workmates and friends when they returned home. The distorted image of the protest was to prove useful in the long run for those opposing future events of this kind.

"One night someone was found passed out in the camp and no one knew what was wrong with him. An ambulance was called and the police would not let it through. The ambulance people had to negotiate with the police to be let through and were actually scared to come into the camp because of the negative media coverage that they had seen. They really thought the protesters were going to do something to them."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE A, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"After the protest there was certainly a sense that the media had really skewed things. When I went to stay with friends they were very negative and I had to justify being there when I knew that it had been the protesters who had been set upon for days running. It seemed like the media had portrayed all the protesters as irrationally violent towards the police and that nothing had ever been provoked."

**LAURA MACFARLANE, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

"I think a lot of people were forced to think about how the media manipulates events. None of us were seeing the TV reports whilst we were there and we came back to our jobs and heard about all this negativity. That was confronting."

**JULES MCLELLAN, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

"I guess it was one of the first big actions where the disjunct between the mainstream media coverage and the reality was so large as to be scary. It was definitely a point where I could see the media as pure elite propaganda. It



was also a point where the police media manipulation and counter-spin was obvious and highly effective.”

**ANTHONY KELLY, Interview, August 2008**

“When I got back to Melbourne I was quite shocked by how negative the media coverage had been. It galvanised me in my ideas about the role of the media in public debate and showed me that you cannot expect to get positive coverage by just doing the right thing. Subsequently in my work as a Communication Studies lecturer I have used footage from AIDEX and from the 1992 George Bush demonstrations to show my students that even if there is footage showing protesters being set upon and dragged off they are the ones who will be framed as initiating the violence. It’s quite amazing how much a difference it makes playing the footage with and without the voice-over or the headline.”

**SUSAN LUCKMAN, Interview, August 2008**

“A lot of people who were at the camp saw the newspapers, but had no idea of how they’d been portrayed on the TV each night. Most of them left Canberra feeling pretty shell-shocked and then had to face this huge backlash from family members, from the organisations they’d represented and from the community in general. It forced a lot of people to wake up about the media’s role in society.

Perversely the negative media actually worked against the arms industry. By misrepresenting us they scared off a lot of companies and government officials who didn’t want to see this rabid, avocado pip spiking mob in their town (laughter). However it also worked against the peace movement because a lot of people were frightened off from taking part in or being associated with such protests. It was also a big shock to people in the mainstream and church groups who had never experienced such negativity before.”

**“DELILAH”, Interview, August 2008**

“We knew that if we made enough of a ruckus then the media would have to report it and that was about all we expected from them. At that time Kerry Packer, who was on the board of Australian Defence Industries, and Rupert Murdoch, who was on the board of United Technologies, controlled most of the media in Australia, so there was no way that their outlets were not going to speak in favour of the arms fair. They might have a bit of dissent, but they were not going to laud the protesters. You expected a little more lassitude from the ABC, but not much more.

Although the media mainly said negative things about the protesters, there were exceptions. Overall I thought the fact that we got such a huge amount of coverage was positive. By the end of the protest there was hardly anyone in Australia who didn’t know that there had been an arms fair, that Australia was selling weapons overseas, that this was supported by Australian government and industry and that some people didn’t think it was a good idea. Even the negative side of the coverage helped create enough hype for us to get AIDEX ’93 called off.”

**JACOB GRECH, Interview, July 2008**

## SUNDAY 24TH NOVEMBER

An Ecumenical service is held at Parliament and a campsite set up on Parliament lawns as the numbers blockading the NATEX site continue to build. In the morning a number of women meet at the campsite, some displeased with incidents of "male violence."

During a blockade of cars leaving the site police push vehicles through the crowd and one man is run over receiving injuries to his arm. No first aid is given and he is arrested for his troubles. At the Main Gate a line of police are brought out to face protesters surrounding the huge prop of a fist, some of whom dance around their adversaries.

"On the Sunday morning I joined the group of 30 people trying to stop cars from leaving the AIDEX compound and the police were trying to help the cars leave. There were only a handful of police present and they were well outnumbered by demonstrators. They did not know how to handle the situation and caused more confrontation than trying to help people from getting hurt. At one point the police were trying to push a car through while protesters were standing in front of it. In the process the car ran over the arm of one of the protesters lying in front of it. The police then dragged this hurt man out of the way and twisted both his arms (one that was injured) behind his back and pushed him to the ground to await the police van to arrive."

### **INTERVIEWEE, Piecing It Together: Hearing The Stories Of AIDEX '91, Penniless Productions, 1995**

By the afternoon only 17 displays are in place and the exhibition organisers become increasingly desperate to get equipment onto the site. The police stage a diversionary attack on the Main Gate and are forced to cut a hole in the fence on Northborne Avenue to get a convoy of 20 trucks inside.

"The cops brought in a police rescue van and everyone mobbed it at the Main Gate. Whilst we were holding that back they cut a hole in the fence down on Northborne Avenue. A few people tried to throw themselves in front of the trucks, but by the time most of us got there it was all over and they were wiring up the fence again."

### **"CHRIS", Interview, July 2008**

As the police struggle to breach the pickets they resort to increasing violence and liaison between the protest organisers and police command breaks down. In desperation the AFP draft in desk staff and interstate officers inexperienced in front line operations as well as members of allied departments. Many of these appear out of uniform in vests reading "Police" and lack appropriate training or clothing.

"The media was never very supportive, but after the first few days when the organisers couldn't get the displays in and all the trucks started backing up it started getting more extreme questioning how the police and government could let these hippies push them around. The police treatment had already

been rough, but it seemed that with that rhetoric the government was stung into action and gave the order to go in with no holds barred. They escalated things by bringing in more police and having the OSG parade up and down which was psychologically stressful.”

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

“We now know from people on the other side that they brought in customs officials and people from security forces and gave them police vests to wear.”

**“DELILAH”, Interview, August 2008**

“At times there was a lot of camaraderie with the cops, which is something I need to remind myself of. There were individual actions organised, but there was mainly hours of standing on the picket line and you’d be staring into the face of the one cop for ages. I was in the public service at the time so we were in the same union as the Federal police. Lots of the cops had been down there on a detective’s training course and they’d been forced into serving. They’d been there on a bloody course and the next thing they knew they were on a picket line opposite us.

At times there would be a lot of laughs with the cops, but other days they were very edgy and I think they deliberately wore them out. I remember one night and it was quite cold in Canberra. They had chairs, but they were all in short sleeved shirts and we were all in jumpers and blankets and I’m sure they were wearing them down so they’d be frazzled in the morning and go in harder. I don’t know where their union was (laughter).”

**JULES MCLELLAN, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

“There had already been so much media coverage about these ‘violent’ protesters that a lot of the police who were brought in were quite terrified...”

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE C, Radio Skid Row, December 1992**

“I thought the real test of AIDEX was how people responded to that level of violence. Most people had been to a protest before, but few had been to one that was so violent. It was a real shock and would have been more so for those people who would have never had to deal with violence or aggressive police before. You’d even see police being shocked by other police being violent. The overall police presence was very violent, but you could see some of them thinking ‘I didn’t sign up for this.’”

**LAURA MACFARLANE, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

“Much of the protest involved standing face to face with the one police officer for hours on end waiting for things to happen. I remember having a lovely discussion with this one cop about his kids and his life, just yakking away. What really freaked me out was that when the order came through to disperse us I still got my arm bent back and was elbowed out of the way. He wasn’t amongst the worst of them, but the mitigating effect of humanising yourself counted for very little.”

**SUSAN LUCKMAN, Interview, August 2008**

Members of the paramilitary Operations Support Group (OSG) are also brought in to provide extra muscle. Trained in paramilitary operations and crowd control

the OSG often use martial arts holds and wrist locks to disable protesters choking them and breaking small bones in the process. The Commonwealth Ombudsman later condemns the use of these holds as they are capable of causing fractures and severe injuries to the neck, eyes and brain.

"I was badly handled by police on a number of occasions. I was grabbed under the jaw and it was quite painful. It didn't freak me out or surprise me because you'd see these guys getting amped up, standing in the sun for hours, just getting more and more aggressive. When they were set loose it did not surprise me that they ended up being violent."

**LAURA MACFARLANE, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

"I remember them using this wrist lock that could break some tiny bone. At the camp meetings people were being told that if their wrist was in pain they should get a cast put on because the fracture wouldn't show up on X-Rays. After the first day or word got around as well to remove your ear rings because they were getting torn out in scuffles."

**"CHRIS", Interview, August 2008**

"You could see that the OSG were loving it, but that the ordinary coppers really didn't want to be there, their heart really wasn't in it. The OSG were getting to practice all their grips and smashes and various formations. They were having a ball, but the ordinary coppers were stuck out in the heat for hours on end for 7, 8, 9 days in a row and they didn't want to be there."

**COLM MCNAUGHTON, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

"Having a big fracas worked for the police. They used it to justify asking for more weapons and powers. They spent a lot of time trying to catch up to us, but the situation also gave them a chance to try out all sorts of tactics."

**"DELILAH", Interview, August 2008**

During the afternoon a series of confrontations take place in the remote area located at the back of NATEX. One truck enters through a gate after a small number of protesters are thrown out of the way by the police. Following the police violence tempers are high and the entrance is quickly reinforced preventing a convoy of vehicles from entering. During the standoff cars are kicked and graffitied and their tyres let down. In the process of the police attempting to force the gate open it swings back and forth flailing into a car at the front of the convoy. The scuffles see a protester's arm, a policeman's nose broken and a car windscreen smashed. The incident receives major coverage on evening news reports including false reports of tyres being slashed.

"I took part in blockades of the main gates a number of times, but the part I enjoyed most was climbing aboard a large army truck as it took off across a paddock to try to get in the back way. I climbed on the roof and then the bonnet as fellow Catholic Worker Damien LeGoullon clung to the back. I stretched my arms and body across the windscreen to hinder the driver's vision and called out to him 'Stop, we've got you surrounded!' Sadly he just smiled and I was eventually unceremoniously pulled off."

**JIM DOWLING, Interview, September 2008**

"We managed to lock the gate, but not without a struggle with the police. They tried to push cars through the gate even though there were many people in front of it. The cars had their engines running and one person who laying beside a car had his arm gashed by its wheel, despite the fact the police knew he was there.

The police in my mind over reacted and used heavy handed tactics in a situation that needed a bit of common sense. In the end we managed to turn cars and trucks back."

**JOHN RENSHAW, 'Evaluation of the Anti-AIDEX Campaign', Self Published, December 1991**

On dusk two buses and ten police cars, backed by 100 police, force their way through the pickets to take the Racecourse Gate. Despite police claims that they need to help equestrians leave the site only trucks involved with AIDEX leave during this time.

"I've been in Canberra since Saturday afternoon and have been involved in the human blockade here. We've been letting in people for the horse show and the dog show, but not letting the AIDEX people in and not one got in yesterday... I think because we've been so successful they've now decided to attack this gate. I've heard police say that they were so surprised that such a peaceful protest could be so successful and it was, it was great to see that that sort of organisation can come through."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE, Radio Skid Row, 24 November 2007**

"Fairly early on the Sunday evening they tried to break the Racecourse gate, which was the only one that didn't have barricades. The police broke through the line physically and were throwing people on the ground and out of the way of the trucks that they were letting straight through."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE F, Radio Skid Row, December 2007**

"I was involved in a peaceful picket at one of the three main gates to the NATEX Centre. There had been little police presence during the day, and the 100 or so protesters had successfully stopped people from entering the arms exhibition, though others involved in a horse and dog show were allowed through.

Police and picket numbers began to build up as a rumour spread that there was to be an attempt to get trucks through. Then, about 6.30 pm the police surged forward to create a cordoned area outside the gate. Not long afterwards, several trucks were driven out of the site, through the crowd. Several protesters were punched and kicked by police, and three were arrested."

**DAVE WRIGHT, 'A Training Exercise For Police Violence', Green Left Weekly, 4 December 1991**

With the police setting up a perimeter directly outside the Racecourse Gate the pickets move to block the surrounding road. When the police begin pushing journalists and camera-people away from the site protesters begin chanting "Keep the media here."

In an attempt to intimidate the crowd the OSG are brought out in full riot gear with batons and positioned behind the other police. They commence banging on their shields and marching around in practice maneuvers. In response the protesters maintain their blockade and sing songs ignoring threats that they will all be arrested. The stand off between police and the pickets lasts till at least 2am with NATEX security threatening pickets at other the gates around midnight.

"It became clear the police wanted to clear the picket. There were 40-50 OSG officers with batons, and a large number of Federal Police. By about 9 pm I thought things would cool down a little, but the police moved to establish a barricade around the sides of the gate.

I was sitting in a group of protesters and in the space of about five minutes I was transformed from passive participant to police target. The person sitting in front of me was punched, kicked and eventually dragged away by police yelling 'Move, fuckin' move'. After him, I was next. Punching, kicking police pushed forward yelling 'Move, move,' but behind me others were pushing forward.

I became the centre of a tug-o'-war between the police and the protesters. Then the cops threw me backwards into the crowd. At one point my legs were above my head and I was on top of people who had been sitting behind me.

Then a senior police officer pointed at me and said 'That's the one' and some cops grabbed my legs. I was flung over the top of the cordon and onto the ground, where I was kicked, punched and dragged away. As I got to my feet, I heard footsteps behind me, and as I looked over my shoulder I was king-hit on the jaw by a cop screaming, 'You fucking cunt'. He ran off, but I recognised him. Earlier in the evening he had chased and tried to beat a young woman...

After he ran off, I was clipped over the back of the head with a baton and thrown against the paddy wagon. I was hit twice more before being frisked. My complaint that I thought my jaw was broken was met by laughter from the four police near the paddy wagon. I was thrown in the wagon, where I was held for about three hours with four others who had also been bashed and kicked.

One young man was streaming blood from what looked like a broken nose. Two more people were thrown in, including a young woman who had been stood against the paddy wagon and frisked by a male police officer. She was screaming and crying, and a couple of us yelled 'Rape is a crime.' They quickly put her in with us, and the charges against her were later dropped.

From inside the wagon we could hear the police preparing to mount a major offensive. There were police dogs in the background, and one officer laughed, 'Good, we're going to use the dogs'. The riot police started banging their batons on their shields, and one yelled, 'Let's kick some arse', and another called, 'Let's get the hippies'...

We were held for about 16 hours, with no medical attention and were refused legal advice until just prior to our court appearance. My property was not returned for 24 hours. I was bailed on a \$2000 surety, but the protester before me was put on a \$1000 surety and instructed to report three times a week to his local police station in Sydney until his court appearance at the end of March. The charge: unreasonable obstruction.

I eventually went to a doctor, who said he had left Queensland to get away from this sort of police brutality. He said he was not surprised at my injuries, however, as he had treated homeless kids who had been beaten by police."

**DAVE WRIGHT, 'A Training Exercise For Police Violence', Green Left Weekly, 4 December 1991**

"Fear so intense it's breathtaking. So many police it's hard to believe, piling out of buses and pulling on their latex gloves, closing in. The Operational Support Group jogging down in formation, piling people into paddy wagons in choke holds, twisting arms and legs, kicking people who are on the ground, pulling the hair and limbs of people who aren't resisting. Dragging bare feet over concrete and broken glass.

Police officers bursting into tears when we sing to them or when we talk to them. Protesters sharing bananas with the police. The cops say we threw buckets of urine on them, but who knows how the rumour began? None of the people I've spoken to saw it or heard of it. We apologise to the cops anyway.

Singing drowning out anger. One of the protesters from Adelaide crying his eyes out because of the violence of other protesters. I heard the cops threw him and his bike to the ground and kicked him. I remember his lover comforting him, holding him as he wept.

Wendy comforting a woman singing with us who freaked out last night and just burst into tears, keeping on singing with us while she stroked and held. And the crying woman sitting up eventually and continuing to sing with us. Being threatened with arrest for simply being there and singing.

Going up to men who are harassing and antagonising the cops and telling them, we've decided just to sing to the cops and not to hassle them. If you want to yell at them can you do it somewhere else? Is that alright with you? And having them look sheepish and say, 'of course', or 'yeah' and then start to sing with us. The people who'd been involved in the confrontation joining the song. Passing on the words back and forth:

Hold that line, hold that line  
Sisters, brothers never weaken  
Hold that picket line."

**MARY HEATH, 'Protest Opposing AIDEX 1991', Unpublished recollections, 1991**

"We joined the blockade. One minute we were chanting and the next we linked arms with everyone. The news media came out and did their six o'clock spots and then started to leave. Once they'd gone the police deployed the OSG. It was getting dark and we'd already been sitting there for hours. The thing that struck me was that there was no traffic, no one was trying to get in and nothing was happening, yet they decided, 'The news has gone to bed, time to exert some authority over these whippersnappers.'

They, literally, read the Riot Act so that they could do what they needed to do and I was sitting there quaking in my boots. It was the first time I'd been in that kind of blockade and I was thinking 'Wow there really is a Riot Act' because you'd heard the term plenty of times, but I didn't know they had to actually read it out aloud (laughter).

People were chanting 'The whole world is watching', thinking that the



presence of the media might inhibit the police from being too violent, which of course it didn't (laughter).

Once they moved in it was horrific. It was a moment in which my life changed and my youthful naïve approach to changing the world just dissipated. I'd been declared a threat to society and it seemed ridiculous.

They only arrested seven people, but one of them was the woman we were billeted with and she was really traumatised. She was taken behind the paddy wagon and sexually assaulted in that her breasts were grabbed. Her father was someone senior in the military, police or foreign affairs—some part of government vaguely related to the event—and when she talked to him a few days later he said 'What did you expect?' As far as he was concerned it was standard operating procedure, at least when dealing with troublemakers like peace protesters.

It was a real eye opener for me because it was a disproportionate response to a bunch of nice people just sitting there linking arms to block a road that no one wanted to use in the middle of the night. I remember thinking that the group of people I was with were unprepared for such a heavy situation. My sister was wearing a short skirt and they were dragging people across the asphalt and gravel and through glass. We hadn't brought any water or food either and wound up being out in the cold for hours. I couldn't go to the toilet either which was uncomfortable (laughter)."

**SUSAN LUCKMAN, Interview, August 2008**

"Again and again the cops brutally waded into the crowd to try to clear the gate. But they could not shift us. When police tried dragging individuals away others would grab them and pull them back into the crowd. Late in the night the police commander announced that the riot squad would be unleashed if we did not leave. We could see them forming up in the dark, fully equipped with long batons and riot shields. Even when they donned their helmets for action, the crowd—though terrified—did not flinch. They shouted down those in the crowd who called on us to leave.

Even when the police offered a compromise—they would pull back if they were allowed to put up a plastic fence—the crowd refused to budge. Eventually in the early hours of the morning the police retreated, their partially erected fence was pulled down and the demonstrators began an all-night vigil on the gate. We had called their bluff and our solidarity had won us our first major victory."

**INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANISATION, 'The Lessons Of AIDEX', ISO, 1992**

"Later on when we had regrouped they had the riot police out with their batons and shields and one guy from the ISO was negotiating with the police. The police were suggesting they put a fence across the road to make it easier to control that gate. Everyone on the picket sat down and discussed this for ages whilst the police just stood there waiting for our decision."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE F, Radio Skid Row, December 2007**

"There were conditions. They wanted their police to be able to change shift and go home. There was never any problem with this, we wanted them to go home (laughter). We weren't blockading the police so they could go anytime they



Tug-o-war on the picket line (Leo Bild)



Cheers as the OSG leave (Leo Bild)

liked. They wanted to have a caravan placed there and wanted to leave half a dozen police on the gate or in the caravan."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE B, Radio Skid Row, December 2007**

"They wanted us to let them set up an orange fence line in front of the gate so that they would control the area directly in front of the gate. It was never going to happen, but they just sat there and waited all the time whilst we talked about it."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE F, Radio Skid Row, December 2007**

"Everyone was chanting 'We go when AIDEX goes!'"

**"CHRIS", Interview, July 2008**

"I was sitting in the front row and they looked really vicious. They were doing practice runs with their shields and helmets. I've dealt with police in uniform before and they can be pretty vicious, but I've never dealt with riot police before and it was pretty scary. But we held strong and after a while they realised that we weren't going to leave and that to unleash a huge amount of force on us would be pretty serious. Eventually they folded and went away."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE D, Radio Skid Row, December 2007**

During the long periods of tension and boredom the picketers soon came up with ways to amuse themselves. At times the humour is internally directed as in a case where one set of protesters sing Black Sabbath's 'War Pigs' in an attempt to drown out the more spiritual stylings of others singing Goddess songs. Whilst members of the Sydney Peace Squadron regularly lampoon the OSG a song from Monty Python's *Life Of Brian* soon becomes the unofficial AIDEX '91 anthem.

"On the Sunday night before AIDEX opened, after a day of successful picketing, we found the OSG lined up behind one of the main entrances donning helmets, riot shields and batons. How did we respond? Did we break up the pavement to make missiles or fashion clubs to counter the police truncheons? No, someone started singing Monty Python's 'Always Look on the Bright Side of Life' and the whole crowd followed suit."

**INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANISATION, 'The Lessons Of AIDEX', ISO, 1992**

"You'd be sitting on the road, tired and dusty and scared and up come these blue overalled OSG who form a double line around you. You start to get a bit worried and people are drumming and so forth and then the OSG take out their gloves and start putting them on. You're frightened and afraid you're going to get hurt. There's this incredible rising tension and that's when we began singing 'Always Look on the Bright Side of Life' (laughter)."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE L, Radio Skid Row, December 2007**

"Whenever the cops put on their latex gloves you knew there would be blood. Why else would they be wearing them? There was one point where it got very quiet and really looked like people were going to get mashed. Some card began singing 'Always Look on the Bright Side of Life' which just cracked everyone up. The front line cops laughed so much they had to take them away for a bit."

**"CHRIS", Interview, May 2008**

“All through the week people would use humour to lighten what were very tense moments.”

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE F, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

“On the Sunday night there was a line of riot police at the Racecourse gate and it was getting very tense and quiet. I went off and got my OSG street theatre outfit and came back and joined the line of police. It took them a little while to realise who I was (laughter). Everyone broke up in laughter and it disarmed the whole thing. My outfit was just overalls and an army belt and a fake baton and a baseball cap with a little peace sign on it. The OSG got annoyed and kept coming over and shouldering against me and slowly trying to push me off the line. After fifteen minutes of shouldering back I decided I’d done my routine and left.”

**MALE INTERVIEWEE K, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

During the early hours of the morning police and AIDEX organisers perform another surprise attack, this time taking pickets at Shell Gate by surprise. By the time the small number of sleeping blockaders are able to mobilize themselves the trucks are long gone, capping off another exhausting day.

“Ironically, it was the Shell Gate, with the car bodies, and fire drums where the police decided to do their first major convoy of trucks in. They cut the fence from inside and rushed through at night. People were asleep and there weren’t enough people to stop them pushing through. About ten or so large trucks got inside and it was a real infringement on our combined effort to blockade the whole place.”

**ANTHONY KELLY, Interview, August 2008**

“At one point they started sneaking around the perimeter with bolt cutters. They’d cut a hole in the fence at 3am or whatever and sneak some trucks in and then wire it up. People cottoned on quickly and soon you had protesters doing laps of the whole site to keep an eye out.”

**SAM LORD, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

## **MONDAY 25TH NOVEMBER**

With exhibitors unable to get all their gear on site exhibition organiser Bob Day, alongside the Defence Department’s public relations officer Brigadier Adrian D’Hage, attacks the ACT ALP. Day admits that many of the exhibitors and potential attendees are feeling intimidated and calls on the ACT to institute a State of Emergency. The National Secretary of the Federal Police Association Mike Hogg also conducts a series of media interviews claiming that it has been the protesters and not the police who have been violent, an accusation that much of the mainstream media will echo in the days to come.

With protesters continuing to converge on NATEX the protest at Parliament is largely abandoned although the campsite is maintained to act as an information point and a place for rest. During the day women meet at the NATEX site to plan for Wednesday’s Day Of Action. Greens WA Senator Jo Vallentine, who is later arrested, gives a speech in which she condemns the arms trade and calls on the

pickets to continue to work towards “stopping AIDEX.” Public transport to the NATEX area is cancelled and some nearby roads blocked by police.

“Public transport won’t go to NATEX. An ACTION [public transport] official hassles us in the city, saying the bus won’t be permitted to go any further than the Watson shops. He won’t listen to anything we say, much less discuss it. The driver of the bus begs to differ and actually drives us to the old Watson terminus, much closer to NATEX.

We walk down from Watson, then the cops arrive in an ACTION bus...”

**MARY HEATH, ‘Protest Opposing AIDEX 1991’, Unpublished article, 1991**

With the two gates on Flemington Road held by the police the majority of protesters concentrate on blockading the road in front of the police lines. One tripod is set up outside the Main Gate and another outside the Racecourse Gate with crowds and drummers gathering beneath each.

“The people from Chaelundi had experience building tripods in the forests and came along and built them on the road.”

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE H, Radio Skid Row, December 2007**

“Tripods are three poles about nine metres long joined together by wire and rope. Someone sits up the top. The object is that they don’t fall off the nest whilst it blocks the road. The only way to get them down is to cut them down which is very unsafe and uses up a lot of police time and power. Hopefully we can exhaust what they have.

We went out a few days ago into the pine forest and it was amazing. We found thousands of pre-made tripod poles that Gaia had especially put there for us. We’ll use those and some other things to bamboozle the police.”

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE, Radio Skid Row, 25 November 1991**

“On the Monday people got the tripods up so fast and the police were a bit dazed because they’d been out all night in their short sleeved shirts. They were like ‘You’re not going to put that up on the road are you?’ ‘No, no, on the side.’ Then within moments there it was [laughter].”

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE G, Radio Skid Row, December 2007**

“Police called in firefighters to dismantle it [the tripod], but when they found the picket line was endorsed by the Trades and Labour Council they drove off to thunderous applause. Council workers [also] refused to move material which had been used for barricades.”

**INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANISATION, ‘The Lessons Of AIDEX’, ISO, 1992**

“They called in the fire brigade this morning, but they said it wasn’t an emergency and left so they’ve had to bring in private contractors... They use a cherry-picker and the person in the cherry-picker ties themselves to the person at the top of the tripod so they can’t fall off whilst they cut the legs off the tripod in chunks at a time. In this case we’ve spiked the trees, put nails in them, so they can’t use a chainsaw. You tell them so that they don’t hurt themselves. There are also a lot of people at the moment surrounding the

tripods, sitting underneath them and around the legs, so they will have to drag the people away to get in.”

**MALE INTERVIEWEE, Radio Skid Row, 25 November 1991**

“For many city-based Socialists it was the first time they’d seen tripods in action and the anarchist and forest feral inspired blockades were a new thing to them. The disjuncture between this style of action and the socialist mass marching models was the most pronounced schism I noticed. I remember constant calls for a march into Canberra which seemed the most ridiculous thing imaginable at the time.”

**ANTHONY KELLY, Interview, August 2008**

“I remember thinking that tripods were not such a good idea as they rely on the police wanting to avoid injuring those sitting on top and at AIDEX they seemed pretty happy to hurt us. Some drummers were hitting oil drums under the tripods and one freak was performing a loud and intense piece which seemed to involve placing a ritual curse upon the police and their families. Whilst it all seemed pretty corny to me it must have seriously spun some of the cops out because they later busted through the protestors to arrest the guy.”

**“CHRIS”, Interview, 2008**

“I’m not sure to this day that drumming is the best accompaniment for that kind of protest. People were drumming loudly and rapidly and it added to the rising tension.”

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

One truck manages to enter through the Racecourse Gate in the morning, but the rest of its convoy is held up around the corner for three hours. An orange fence-way is set up by the police to allow workers and others to enter along the fence line. At one point a truck carrying weapons displays and driven by Army personnel attempts to force its way through the crowd with the result that its windscreen is smashed whilst people dance on its roof. Another incident sees a utility truck drive through the crowd at speed whilst a man in the back swings a baseball bat. Police stand by despite the fact that the men are later seen within the grounds and are captured on video wandering around the exhibition the next day.

At around 1pm the police encircle the crowd in and around the tripods outside the Middle Gate. Up to 250 uniformed officers surround them at the front whilst a large number of OSG officers are brought in at the rear. Tensions build and while some protesters are initially told by senior police that they can leave, many find themselves prevented from doing so, a decision which will prove costly for the police later in court. The police remove their badges before donning latex gloves. With the uniformed police continuing to secure the area the protesters are arrested by the OSG before being photographed and processed on site.

“They didn’t even wait until people had had a chance to walk out... they just began grabbing people by the hair and arresting them. We didn’t hear the five minute warning the first time and afterwards we didn’t hear it from the police, we heard it from someone within the protest.”

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE, Radio 3CR, 25 November 1991**





Clockwise from top left: Army trucks driven back (Unknown), Martial arts holds on display (Unknown), Tripod sitters (Susan Luckman), Martial arts wrist lock (Unknown), Highschool arrestee (Unknown), More tripods (Leo Bild)



"People locked arms and the police put on either leather or latex gloves. Then a police woman went up to a young woman who was sitting in the front row and slapped her hard across the face. The protester put her hands up to protect herself and was dragged away which created a hole in the lock down. From there they systematically carted us off."

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

"[The police] pile out and as I walk up they begin to pull their latex gloves on. I begin looking among the protesters sitting on the ground between the gate and a barricade, looking for anyone I know or recognise from the night before. I can't see anyone I know.

I eventually spot Bill, who is saying things like 'this looks like a bloodbath' and 'this is really scary'. As the uniformed police begin to close in in a ring I decide not to stay inside when the warning is given - five minutes and then we arrest you all. So scared I can hardly breathe, afraid the cops will simply close in. Judging by the previous day's events, expecting it to be very violent. Putting my arm around Bill as he says how scary this is for the third time. For once no cynicism.

He puts his arm around me too and we just stand and watch. We watch the chanting protesters, all sitting, none doing anything more violent than verbal abuse. At this point the OSG march down in formation and begin to pull people out in fives and tens, twisting arms, kicking and punching people, pulling limbs, pulling hair, dragging people who are clearly prepared to walk. There are at least as many cops as protesters.

So many people are arrested that they fill all the paddy wagons and have to go back for more, taking people to the lockup so they can bring the vans back. There is a break, and then more paddy wagons arrive and more protesters are carted off. It is awful. We begin talking to the cops, some of whom worked a 17 hour day the previous day. Everyone sharing water and cars, messages travelling fast from one place to another. Ringing Mum to tell her I haven't been arrested because by now she's seen 200 arrested on TV and is probably beside herself.

Later, arrests happen with no warning at all, nothing orderly about it. The OSG simply closing in and attacking people. I saw people being punched, kicked, thrown around. Others were choked, kneed in the balls, thrown face down onto gravel, and so on. I was distraught, and so were many, many others. Standing in tears watching all this, I'm face to face with a young cop who has his back to it all. He's in tears too."

**MARY HEATH, 'Protest Opposing AIDEX 1991', Unpublished article, 1991**

"We were at the Main Gate when we got arrested. Everyone was sitting under a tripod. The guy who was meant to be at the top of it couldn't get up there. I was 25 at the time and there was this 'old' guy, who was probably 35, and he just shinnied up the top without a moment's hesitation."

**PAUL KIDNEY, Radio 3CR, November 2007**

"No one saw him go for a wee the whole time and he was perched up there like a Meerkat for hours."

**JULES MCLELLAN, Radio 3CR, November 2007**

"The police eventually brought in a van to get the man off the top, but to get the van in they had to remove everyone else. They took us all one at a time. They'd ask if you wanted to go and you'd say 'No' and then two of them would pick you up and you'd go limp to make it a bit harder for them... I was one of the last people to get dragged away and arrested because I was on the edge of the group. I'd come from another gate and was going to the toilet when I saw what was happening and jumped in with the rest... Once I was arrested I went to a different lock up to the others and they seemed to be driving around and around for hours until they found somewhere to put us. I made sure I was the first one out of the van because I was busting for a piss (laughter)."

**PAUL KIDNEY, Radio 3CR, November 2007**

"I was trying to organise people to take photos of the police arresting people. From where I was standing the OSG were using heavy handed tactics... they pulled people's hair, twisted wrists, etc. Before I knew it I was set upon by four OSG cops. I was prepared to walk with them, but they used their violence against me as they did with everyone else. While they were pulling my hair and twisting my wrist I had a number of items taken off me including my wallet which had over \$30 in it. I was put into a bus with many others to be taken to the police station."

**JOHN RENSHAW, 'Evaluation of the Anti-AIDEX Campaign', Self published, December 1991**

"I had a friend there who was a teacher. He was very courageous and got arrested early on on one of the blockades. There were two of his students there and they were heard discussing it. One said 'I didn't see it' and the other said 'Oh, I did, Sir is a legend!' (laughter)."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE I, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

Drumming echoes across Flemington Road as the crowd continues to link arms. The police aggressively remove and arrest around 180 people for a suspected breach of the peace, but due to the size of the crowd and a lack of facilities find themselves taking three to four hours to do so.

"The day of the mass arrests was quite scary. We'd gone beyond the euphoria of having the numbers and the bodies and the tripods in place. It was really good for a while, but everything was so drawn out and there came the point where the OSG put on their gloves and you knew that arrest was immediate. People were singing 'Always Look on the Bright Side of Life', and that alleviated the stress for a while, but then they started pulling people out and the tension built again. I remember feeling so impotent. I had two girls in their early teens next to me and they were crying and I didn't feel like I could do anything for them..."

There was a gap in the arrests when nothing was happening. The realisation dawned on us and in great bogan fashion we began singing 'You've run out of paddy wagons, Doo dah, doo dah, You've run out of paddy wagons, All the doo dah day.' There were moments like that that seemed to alleviate all the tension and fear."

**JULES, Radio 3CR, November 2007**

People involved in non-blockading actions are also arrested during the afternoon. An attempt by Uniting Church Minister Neville Watson and a friend to mount a cross outside NATEX sees them later face court on petty charges. Members of the Sydney Peace Squadron, dressed in OSG style overalls and wearing caps with peace symbols on them, are also targeted and their props and banner confiscated. A few years later an unsuccessful attempt is made to reclaim the banner after it appears in an ACT police museum display about AIDEX '91.

"The police would not allow it. Bernadette and I made several attempts and in the end were arrested. We were charged with 'obstructing the traffic' notwithstanding the fact that the road had been blocked off and there was no traffic. One of the journos reckoned we should have been charged with 'inciting people to pray.' The net result was that we spent eight hours in jail and I was fined \$50."

**NEVILLE WATSON, Nonviolence Today #24 January/February 1992, p5**

"We came out in our OSG costumes and were 'Hut, hut, hut, hutting' and all that. We got close to their lines and they formed up in a wedge and thought we were going to charge through. Then we threw an inflatable missile in the air. That was cool for a few seconds and then a senior officer said 'Get that missile off them' and there was a rough and tumble and people got knocked about and handcuffed and taken away. The police lost their cool sometimes, they couldn't get the humorous side of what we were doing."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE D, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"I think the humour of the people taking the piss out of the OSG worked very well. The OSG were trying to be these fearless warriors in defence of the State and you had all these scraggly dudes and women in boiler suits giving them heaps. It was much more effective than us punching on with them because they love all that, it was people taking the piss that they really didn't like."

**COLM MCNAUGHTON, Radio 3CR, December 2008**

"The OSG's practice maneuvers, where they would be jogging around and practicing with their shields, etc were often more ridiculous looking than the street theatre version."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE E, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

A superscope recorder belonging to 3CR and much of the work done by its media team are taken away along with half the team itself while other members of the media are pushed away from the site by police. During and after the arrests protesters engage in debate about the appropriate responses to police violence.

"There were a lot of inexperienced people who saw this antagonism from the police and responded likewise. I found some of the actions at the beginning of the protest pretty distasteful and spoke to a number of people during the week about the alternatives. I felt I was effective with the people I spoke to... With people coming from all over the country you can't really get together to talk it all out which perhaps we should have done down there, but then we didn't really have the time."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE B, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"The main actions involved people sitting on the road in front of the main gates where we were attacked brutally. How do you cope with that?"

**MALE INTERVIEWEE C, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"It's very hard when you see your friends being attacked. Your emotions immediately go through the roof and it's hard not to have an immediately angry response. We're going around trying to keep people more centred, but it's hard when the police are walking around threatening you... We've had harassment from the scab labour threatening to rape women. They've been patrolling up and down outside the camp saying 'We're gonna get you', that sort of shit."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE, Radio Skid Row, 25 November 1991**

"The only violence I saw from the protesters was people reacting to being violently, very violently attacked, being dragged out by their face or their hair, a very natural reaction in self defense... It was preferable to turn your anger into verbal confrontation rather than hitting out."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE D, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"The thing I noticed was that it was the pacifists who got bashed the worst, it really didn't help your well being. They thought 'Great', they could take out all their revenge fantasies on those people because they weren't going to do anything whereas the others are going to fight and scream and whatever."

**COLM MCNAUGHTON, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

Following the arrests the police remove the tripod and clear the road between NATEX and the protest campsite. With the Racecourse and Middle Gates opened and the remaining protesters held at bay, the exhibition's organisers begin rushing equipment and displays onto the site.

"Eli had chained his neck to the tripod and when the police first tried to just pull it down everyone called out because they could've broken his neck."

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

"When Eli was up the tripod and they did the mass arrest they really could have hurt him. They could have quite easily just lobbed him on his head. Some people didn't get arrested so that we could keep an eye on him because you could see some of them really wanted to lob him on his head."

**COLM MCNAUGHTON, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

The number of arrests overwhelms the judicial system which does not have enough jail space for all who have been detained. Many people are held for up to 8 or 9 hours before facing a magistrate. A number complain of being roughed up while in custody and some are strip searched.

"All the women were taken en masse to a huge holding pen. There were at least 80 to 100 of us on these wooden benches. Suddenly someone started re-enacting these scenes from Prisoner. I think there was a fight over the bed, 'C'mon Wrinkles, it's my turn!' and I think there were almost brawls over



A violent arrest (Leo Bild)



Another violent arrest (Leo Bild)

who was going to be Doreen and The Freak (laughter). Meanwhile there was a bunch of really serious women who were appalled by this saying 'I can't believe you activists are doing this.' We were just laughing. Our response was 'C'mon McKenzie, get that banana out of your arse!'"

**JULES MCLELLAN, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

"At the police station there was a mindless amount of intimidation. For no reason, one policeman grabbed my arm and twisted it around my back. Because I'm big enough I was able to get out of it and push him away. I put him on the spot and pointed out that there was no reason to put people in these locks, some were writhing in agony, and he fortunately walked away."

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

"Some of the ferals questioned me about pleading guilty on fabricated evidence. They have not yet realised that, for those who believe the end justifies the means, most evidence is fabricated. Many of the things of which the protesters were accused were 'fabricated' - the most laughable one being that they covered themselves with excrement. You have to be pretty thick to be unable to distinguish brown zinc cream from faeces.

I really do feel for some of these young people. They still naively think that justice is somehow connected with the legal system. Many of them have not yet heard the Magistrate intoning the words 'I can find no reason to disbelieve the police evidence.' They are words I have heard a thousand times and yet they still tear at my guts. I sometimes wonder just how many people have become embittered and disillusioned and rebellious by the hearing of those few words...

Our time in jail was a good one and you really do meet the most interesting people in jail. When I was put into the paddy wagon I saw a guy I thought I recognised and, sure enough, it was Anthony Gwyther - the Ploughshares Catholic Worker who is coming up for trial in December for taking a hammer to a B52 in Darwin and trying to turn 'swords into ploughshares.' In the cells I met a mathematician and we had an interesting time discussing his theory that life is to be found at the edges, at the circumference of the establishment. He was a nominal Catholic and pointed out that when two edges meet there is an enormous amount of vigour and activity.

Another I met was the member of a small Christian community in Victoria which has just disintegrated after eight years or so. He was about twenty-five years of age and really had a grasp of things - so much so that I felt a great deal of 'angst' for him. It's all very well to see more of what it's about when you are sixty years of age, but think of the responsibility of being in that position when you are 25 years of age and having the whole of your life stretching in front of you. These are the people to whom I dips me lid. They are the people for whom I pray and who give me hope.

We also had our moments of hilarity. One was when the police continually asked me about my status as a Barrister and Solicitor and I could not understand why. It subsequently turned out that a story was going about that the police had imprisoned a High Court Judge. Somehow the lines had become crossed with a former President of the Uniting Church who was a High Court



Judge. With names like Wilson and Watson, and both coming from WA, it caused some anxious moments for the police in the lockup, who incidentally were quite delightful. One of the constables wiped her brow in relief when I told her there was nothing to fear and it was only little old me she had to deal with. From that time on whenever she called out my name it was 'Mr. Watson- alias Mr Wilson.'"

### **NEVILLE WATSON, Nonviolence Today #24 January/February 1992**

A series of adjournments take place in the Canberra Magistrates Court amidst much confusion over whether or not the majority of protesters have been charged with anything. Having got their story straight the police eventually state that they have taken the blockaders into custody on the basis of ancient common law powers which allow them to detain anyone they believe is about to "breach the peace." This is an unusual tactic as the police in the ACT have previously always formally charged protesters prior to taking them to court.

Whilst the arrests have succeeded in allowing the police to remove people from the NATEX site an attempt to have the protesters "bound over to keep the peace" and prevented from returning to the area, on the basis that they may "breach the peace", fails as the magistrate rules that each arrestee must be tried individually. Nevertheless he asks the protesters to comply with an order to keep the peace until Friday. Most state that they will resist the order and are released without bail until Wednesday, by which time a test case will have been heard.

## **TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 26TH**

On the opening day of the exhibition an ecumenical service is held outside NATEX. Members of WILPF protest with placards at various city intersections and receive abuse from the police for their efforts. The Point Of Impact conference, exploring the state of the global arms trade and alternatives to it, begins at ANU.

The morning's edition of the Canberra Times sees former National RSL President and DESIKO board member Sir William Keys claim "The organisers of AIDEX would be most happy to arrange an escorted visit over AIDEX for any of its critics. I rather doubt however that any of them will accept that invitation. They clearly subscribe to that age old axiom: Do not confuse me with the facts, I have made up my mind!" When a large number of protesters attempt to take up Keys on his offer they find it has been withdrawn, although a small number eventually do get an official tour. Independent journalists attempting to question Keys at length during his morning press conference also find they get short shrift.

"I am a journalist who works in public radio. I was arbitrarily arrested at the anti-AIDEX protest. My colleague, Annamarie Antonio, and her daughter, were subjected to physical intimidation and harassment. We began our coverage of AIDEX with the press conference held by DESIKO, the company responsible for the exhibition. We were informed by a DESIKO media official that Sir William Keys was 'just going to make a few statements.' The message was clear -- we weren't to ask embarrassing questions.

Most of the journalists, however, did ask pertinent questions -- including



ourselves. But our problem was that Sir William Keys dismissed us and we persisted:

Q: Human rights abuses have been well documented in Indonesia and the Philippines. Yet they are major buyers of Australian arms. How can you argue in favour of this?

A: You're just using the same old clichés that all these people are referring to here...

Q: I don't think that they're clichés ... the Philippines bought \$3 million worth of arms last year. I think you should respond to that.

A: Well, sometimes they need the products that we produce if they're using them for legitimate reasons...

Q: Australia has a defence relationship with Indonesia. You're calling for an inquiry (into the massacre in East Timor), yet you're continuing with the AIDEX exhibition. It seems an irony.

A: Indonesia is not the only country in the world... and Indonesian buyers are not represented here... that's a minuscule part of this whole exercise.

Q: ... minuscule? It means a lot of lives, Sir William Keys.

A: Okay, everything has its negatives...

It went on until the nervous and very irate DESIKO media official pushed Annamarie out of the way, saying that there were more important people than her. He told me that I had asked too many questions."

**NADYA STANI, 'The Free Media Meet Canberra Cops', Green Left Weekly, 11 December 1991**

Inside NATEX the arms fair begins in a subdued mood. The exhibition's organisers admit to the media that whilst AIDEX has been able to go ahead it is incomplete with exhibitors either pulling out or unable to get all of their equipment on site.

"Due to the blockades they couldn't go ahead with their exhibition as planned. A lot of equipment did not make it into NATEX, a lot of trucks were turned back. From our people inside we know there were a number of empty stalls and that a number of exhibitions of field based equipment had to be moved to military facilities. It still went ahead, but no one involved could kid themselves that we weren't winning a fight against all odds when you consider that the Australian, American and major governments and manufacturers wanted it to go ahead and a few hundred activists didn't. The fact that we achieved anything at all was a credit to the protesters who came along.

More than anything though was the psychological effect it had on the people inside. These people, whether they are in charge of the companies or just bimbos handing out leaflets, had up until that point always believed they had the power and the state behind them and that nothing we could do could touch them."

**JACOB GRECH, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

The 1992 CAT TV 'AIDEX 91 - Inside the Australian Arms Industry' video documentary captures, alongside footage of war and the protests outside, a strangely sterile atmosphere inside the fair. Claims made by the Canberra Times, in their front page headline of November 27th, that there 'was not a gun in sight' are definitively rebuked

by footage showing men horsing around with machine guns and rocket launchers.

"I was involved in the media at a variety of levels. As I was interested in direct action politics and peace and disarmament I thought I should make use of my skills. I was going to contribute by going into AIDEX dressed up as an arms trader to capture some on location recordings and maybe do some interviews. At the same time I took a video camera down and thought that maybe I could make something for CAT TV.

To get into character I had a shave and went to a hairdresser and somehow scabbed up a crappy wedding suit from one of my friends (laughter) to try and make myself look suitably arms traderish. I think I failed miserably. I have memories of being inside AIDEX and thinking I was being really covert and then seeing some guys whispering and pointing at me because they could see the LEDs going up to my walkman, which I was intending to just be wearing to listen to music with as I was cruising around to check out bombs (laughter). They could tell I was making a recording with a concealed microphone.

However I did get inside and it was good to look around and pull out a video camera. I had to convince people that I was just another guy in a suit getting excited about looking at bombs and aeroplanes and documenting it for the guys back home (laughter). It was weird, the whole thing of being in that space was surreal with the guys in suits playing with guns and the like.

The other interesting thing was going inside because you had to cross a picket line and that was a pretty fierce picket line, believe me. I got hassled and spat on. It was interesting to think that those people crossed through that line and still went inside and conducted their business."

**JOHN JACOBS, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

ABC Radio's Background Briefing also tours the exhibition conducting interviews with stall holders, attendees and sales representatives. Amongst exhibitors talking up the growing trade opportunities in the Asia-Pacific and "user friendly" rocket launchers, journalist Liz Jackson locates a French arms dealer anticipating the arrival of Indonesian buyers. This contradicts an earlier statement from AIDEX spokesperson Kim Morton claiming that Indonesia and South Africa would not be represented as they fall outside "current government guidelines." When pushed on the exact criteria DESIKO have used to determine who is and isn't allowed in Morton ends the interview leaving Jackson to discuss such matters with Brigadier Adrian D' Hage, the Director of Public Relations for Department of Defence. Whilst regretting the export of weapons to Myanmar D' Hage claims that "business as usual" will continue with Indonesia, regardless of the Dili massacre.

"The single most important event in the lead-up to AIDEX for me, and my biggest personal motivation in going, was the massacre at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili on 12 November 1991. The massacre was horrific enough, but a personal impact of it for me and many others I went to AIDEX with was the fact that a friend and colleague from the Sydney Rainforest Action Group, Kamal Bamadhaj has been shot and killed by Kopassus troops along with hundreds of East Timorese.

I was staying in Kamal's room in Sydney just before the massacre. He had

left for Timor a month or so previously to research and support the emerging nonviolent student movement in Dili. News of the massacre had just reached Australia – the footage and the international political fallout was front page at the time. There was outrage and protests around the country – at consulates and Garuda offices, etc and crosses outside the consulate in Canberra.

It was entirely feasible that the Kopassus troops had used Australian supplied SLR's or armalight rifles (guns) in the massacre - or at least used ammunition manufactured in Australian ADI factories (Australia was a major supplier of ammo at the time).

The very real potential that a friend, activist and a beautiful person had been shot and killed, not only by troops supplied by Australia, but potentially with Australian bullets, was a source of anger at AIDEX – it was probably what drove me most up there and certainly drove my determination to blockade at all costs and to shut the thing down.”

**ANTHONY KELLY, Interview, August 2008**

Amongst the weapons dealers and government trade stalls the Quakers' Peace Committee hosts their own stall spruiking “peace” rather than war, , as they had done in 1989.

“We found a lot more people came to see us. Many of them were disturbed by the demonstration outside and they wanted to come and vindicate what they were doing. They felt unable to talk to the people outside because they just hurled abuse at them. So they came up to the Quakers to explain, as they saw it, that they weren't ‘Merchants Of Death’ and killers and all the other things they were being accused of.

We objected to the way that they were trying to divide us from the people outside, we said it was just a different way of approaching it. We agreed with the concern that was being raised that AIDEX should not be happening and that Australia should not be supporting arms bazaars.

The atmosphere inside AIDEX was very much ‘toys for the boys.’ There wasn't a lot of hardware, the biggest thing was an armoured personnel carrier from Canada. There were a lot of videos and glossy literature and models... There was a lot of non-lethal equipment that is necessary for an army to go into war, but 90% of military equipment is that. It isn't the front end offensive equipment, it is things like boots and medical supplies and the purely defensive equipment like anti-submarine warfare, smoke flares, etc. But these are all very essential to the military.

It was very much men in suits, the only women in there were secretaries giving out literature or women working in the bar and catering. It was about 95% male and most of the men were either from the companies, there were about 138 represented, and a lot of people from the military. Nine countries were represented in the stalls and they were all Western European as were most of the men present.”

**PETER JONES, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

During the afternoon a contingent of protesters make their way to Federal Parliament. Taking their place in the public gallery they heckle Senator Michael

Tate, Minister for Justice, during a speech about the police operation at AIDEX. The Democrats receive cheers when they ask questions about the need for an arms trade whilst figures such as Foreign Minister Gareth Evans and Defence Minister Robert Ray receive a roasting. After a small number of hecklers are ejected the Speaker of the House decides that it is easier to endure a bit of noise than see scuffles and arrests in the Senate and House of Representatives.

In the Canberra courts the test case over the arrest of the protesters for threatening to “breach the peace”, sees the presiding magistrate rule against the police. ACT Chief Magistrate Rohan Cahill states that the police have been unable to prove that the protester involved, Hal Alexander, would have “breached the peace” had they not arrested him, particularly as Alexander claims the police would not let him leave the area. The police concede that it will be too costly and difficult to continue with individual cases against the remaining arrestees, effectively admitting that they are unable to use the courts to keep the protesters away from the site. Nevertheless, they continue to arrest and remove individual protesters on charges of hindering, obstruction and resisting arrest, with the majority of the 234 arrested seeing their charges being dropped before they ever reach court.

Although some protesters report feeling emboldened by the obvious disruption to the fair and the failure of the mass arrests, others complain of a loss of focus from the Tuesday onwards. Other than a minority of NVDA activists those present had not been organised around an affinity group model. However, the protest had seen similarly minded demonstrators cluster around different gates on the basis of preferred tactics. With two of those gates now evicted protesters of different persuasions now find themselves pushed closer together.

Debates within the camp erupt over whether to continue with mass blockading or participate in a variety of activities. Some contend that the protest has lost sight of the issue of the arms trade and become obsessed with defeating the police. Others argue that a focus on police behaviour is inevitable given the level of repressive violence and their role in defending AIDEX.

“I’m frustrated that we haven’t been able to stop it, but I’m glad to see them struggling to get everything ready in time to open today. I’m sure the mass arrests were in order to divert attention away.”

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE, Radio Skid Row, 26 November 1991**

“Once they’d set up a police cordon outside the Main gate our tactics became disjointed and confused. They had a strong enough cordon that if we tried to push through they could rush in reinforcements. The roads were blocked and they weren’t bringing anything in through the gates other than exhibition visitors. After that point we engaged in a lot of sporadic attempts to push through the police in an attempt to retake the space and maybe enter NATEX.”

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

“[On the Tuesday] the police quickly formed a line and by 8.30am had pushed protesters to the far side of the road away from the NATEX site. From that point on any attempts to blockade AIDEX got no further than a battle between police and protesters for the white line on the edge of the road... At this point

we protesters began to lose the initiative. Previously, the police had been responding to our protest focused on AIDEX, now we were focusing on the police, their violence and their unswerving devotion to keeping us off the bitumen...

The exhibition was now open, but at a greatly reduced size and increased cost. The blockade had been successful. It was probably time for the demonstrators to change tactics. In an effort to maintain our focus on what AIDEX meant, many people were questioning the desirability of getting into a televised battle with police. It was suggested that the protest continue with the original agenda of planned actions. This was not acceptable to some sections of the camp who could not remove their focus from police confrontation."

**LOUISE MACDONALD, 'How Was AIDEX?', Chain Reaction #65, March 1992**

"I don't remember being all that disappointed that it had opened because we had so obviously stuffed the whole thing up. They were operating under siege. You rarely win on the day anyway because the powers that be have to make a display of being all powerful. That's certainly what they did at AIDEX. They just kept pouring more cops in and when arresting us didn't succeed they turned up the violence.

"On Sunday, Monday and Tuesday mornings we [the Perseverance Affinity Group] had long affinity group meetings to review tactics. These were always hemmed by strategic assumptions that were not consciously stated or reviewed. One assumption was that AIDEX itself was a good anti-militarist focus. Many of us had come without in-depth discussion of this.

Another assumption was that our goal should be to 'Stop AIDEX.' It became clear that the government and vested interests were willing to put a lot of resources into making AIDEX happen. The goal of stopping AIDEX perhaps was never realistic. Certainly, after Sunday, the blockades were basically not effective from this perspective. It is true they were disruptive, but they were not reaching the goal of 'stopping AIDEX.' Should our goal have been education, should it have been withdrawal of companies? We were having very little or no direct contact with workers, dealers or traders so conversion as a mechanism of change was inappropriate.

Because of the poor choice of tactics the police became our focus to the exclusion of others directly involved with the arms trade. What were the short term goals and focuses of our action? The overwhelming sense of urgency again swamped any review of these questions as we were drawn in often in peacekeeping role in the activities of the other people and groups.

Another problem was that each action we undertook had no planned end. They were unsustainable, resulting in physical and emotional exhaustion. We had expected actions to end with arrest or with the actual completion of the action. However, the police had a 'no-arrest' policy and after Monday the administration was using instead police bodies as human barricades. The use of police in this way resulted in much frustration on their behalf, a reliance on old football techniques and ultimately heightened the violence."

**MARGARET PESTORIUS, 'An AIDEX Experience', Nonviolence Today #25, Mar/April 1992**

"A very small number of demonstrators involved in the AIDEX protest wanted to employ, for want of a better term, confrontationist tactics. These proved fruitless. Directly antagonising the police, verbally and/or physically, simply because of who they are, only gives them licence to fight back, and the police were eager to grab such licence. What's more, their fight-back usually hurts a lot more than anything the confrontationists can do to them.

At the other extreme, a number of demonstrators wished to practise 'non-violent' action which, played by their rules, would be better termed 'pacifism'. These rules included total non-provocation to the point of banning language such as 'march' and 'fight'.

The irony here is that we wanted to be provocative. Being present at the AIDEX site was in itself provocative. The very aims of the demonstration were to provoke the media into publicising the Aidex fiasco and our arguments against it. We wanted to be publicly provocative, without violence.

The AIDEX protests seemed to alternate between these two extremes, with the confrontationists at times blocking democratic decision-making processes by relentlessly interrupting other speakers, speaking unnecessarily loudly to make a point, and even behaving like a group of pied pipers straight out of military school, attempting to lead the group off to "action" before decisions had been voted on.

At times also, democracy did rule and the views of the majority were followed... determined mass action should characterise protests such as those at Aidex. The key was not to be so peaceful that we couldn't even attempt to blockade the road on the one hand, and at the same time not to direct all our anger at the police presence, at the risk of forgetting the major issue at hand, AIDEX itself."

**JULIA PERKINS, 'Tactics and Effective Protest', Green Left Weekly, 11 December 1991**

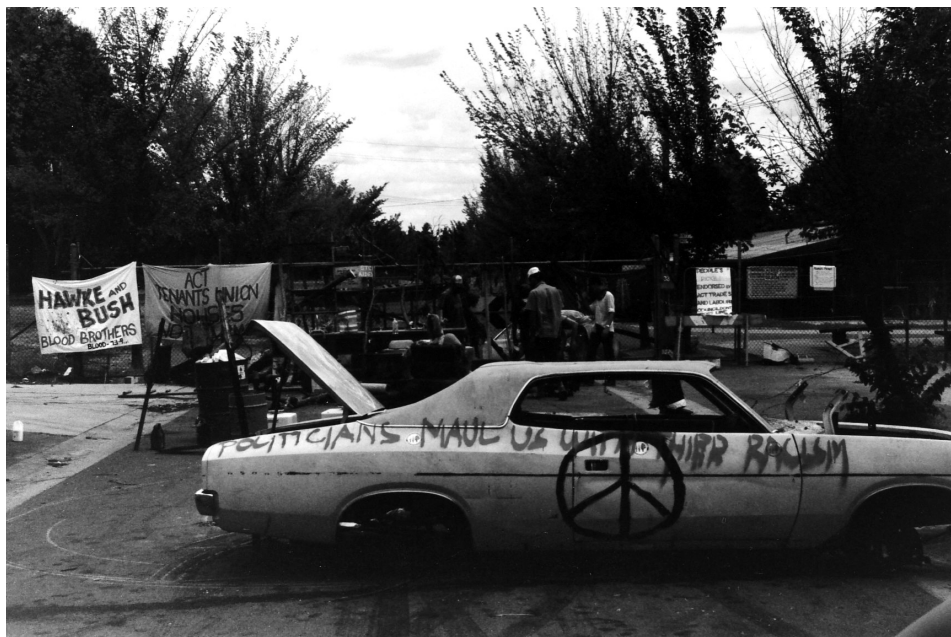
The mass meetings continue to be messy with the Tuesday morning one ending with the majority of protesters pouring onto Flemington road as tripods are set up, in an effort to prevent attendees from entering the site. Many attendees later complain of being harassed and abused, while the Defence Minister Robert Ray pulls out of making a planned appearance. Some protesters continue to try and operate along affinity group lines using star pickets, but the majority take part in mass blockades at one end of the road.

"We marched down the road from the camp to the main gates of AIDEX. The police had erected fencing ten minutes earlier and as we went past many of us pulled it down. One section was put up again, this time by us, and right across the road. As this was happening some demonstrators drove their vehicles into the road and parked them there. Then some bright sparks appeared with a number of logs and began to build tripods... This end of the road we had well and truly blocked.

We played music, danced, talked and sang. All that blocked us from the gates was a row of 'normal' coppers... The front rows of the picket were sitting down and the cops tried to arrest some of those people. Scuffles broke out and tug-o-wars commenced. Many of us tried hard to stop them arresting our fellow demonstrators and to a large degree we succeeded in this. It felt great to push and shove the cops as much as they did us. They were attacking us. They were and always are protecting the interests of those rich bastards who make



Clockwise from top: Inside the arms fair- not a gun in sight?, The gloves go on, Independent media are pushed away, Bikies check out the AIDEX displays (John Jacobs)



Shellgate- Not the Monaro! (Susan Luckman)



profits from the misery and misfortune of others.”

**KEEF AGRO, 'A Story About AIDEX Canberra 1991', Burning Issue #3, April 1992**

“[The Perseverance Affinity group] group decided on a ‘mobile’ blockade. We tried to go beyond the police lines (which actually moved with us) and tried four or five times to burst through the police cordon in order to create a star blockade on the road. This had varying degrees of non-success. We received a lot of physical violence. After ‘lunch’ we de-rolled a bit, surveyed our injuries and virtually decided not to do more.

The Tuesday mobile ‘charge’ actions were tactically very frustrating. At an early morning meeting we grappled with process, searching futilely for a creative solution to the massive police presence. We rejected the tactic of going somewhere else and changing focus completely; into Canberra to the aerospace conference for example. But people were here and we were continually swayed by their presence. They were at AIDEX and they wanted to do something. Many had arrived just that morning under the illusion that AIDEX resistance started only on Tuesday. So we chose a mobile blockade action.

After an unsuccessful attempt at bursting through the police cordon by rolling ourselves into a large blob, we involved an increasing number of people in the design of this action. We held a large meeting in front of the police evaluating what we had done. We aimed : 1) to improve the tactics in order to actually get past the police line, 2) to reduce the amount of police violence by reducing the amount of activist abuse and anger, 3) to maintain a spirit of fun amidst a massive beating.

By the third attempt there were perhaps 150 people involved in this process and a number of creative solutions and innovations were added to the action including having a ‘front row’ hugging police in an effort to distract them while the back row darted through ‘like gazelles’ to form the blockade. This didn’t prevent some officers from savagely pushing activists to the ground and kicking them. One time we counted down from ten together so that police knew exactly when we were coming. And another time we chanted ‘Crocodile, crocodile may we cross your golden river?’

Many, many injuries were suffered in this action. In hindsight I feel it was ridiculous and devastating. And yet the feeling had been overwhelming from those brave people that that was what they wanted to do. Were we all choosing freely? I don’t think so. Decisions with such consequences as severe bruising from kicks and pushing, concussion and whip lash need a lot of fore-thought and emotional preparation. I noticed that injuries were sustained most severely by young women and people who perhaps had fewer skills in de-roling [getting both police and demonstrators to step out of their roles and relate to each other as human beings] and communication. I continually told police that I was precious, asked them not to use their batons and spent a lot of energy making contact with them as human beings. Through all this, though, I forgot that the most important reason for treating police officers with respect is that as humans they deserve it.”

**MARGARET PESTORIUS, 'An AIDEX Experience', Nonviolence Today #25, Mar/April 1992**

With most of the action focused on Flemington Road the blockade at the heavily barricaded Shell Gate begins to wane. Although most attendees and equipment continue to be brought in through the gates and paddocks at the rear of the NATEX site Shell Gate nevertheless sees some strange episodes occur throughout the day.

"We heard an announcement that they needed more people at Shell Gate so three of us went down there to bolster the numbers. There was a car body barricading the entrance. It was completely gutted with no doors and no bonnet and was covered with graffiti and held in place with star pickets. There were only ten of us there when this guy pulled up and starting raving 'Oh my God, you've got my car, it's my car, it's my Monaro!' He was freaking out and we were thinking that maybe he was some kind of police plant, but he seemed to be too passionate and serious about the car for that.

Eventually he calmed down and it turned out that he had bought the car body from the local wreckers. They were sympathetic to the protest and had just let people take whatever was handiest for the barricade, which turned out to be the wreck this guy had already paid for and was going to do up. He couldn't understand how we'd failed to appreciate the majesty of this vehicle, but he agreed not to take it away until he'd brought a replacement. He went off and came back in a truck with another body. To this day there is probably a beautifully restored Monaro with hippy graffiti under its gleaming duco cruising the streets of Canberra (laughter).

Later in the day Channel Ten were visiting Shell Gate and were just about to leave when these two vigilantes pulled up with menace on their mind. One of them had been down earlier and threatened to come back with a mate and sure enough he had. They got out of a car 100 metres away with tyre irons and began walking towards us. We asked the camera team to stay and used the reason that it would be newsworthy because these guys were about to beat the crap out of us (laughter). Eventually a group of the protesters went over to the pair and they backed down and left. It was an insight into the kind of violence you can face when you put yourself out there and stand up for what you believe."

**SUSAN LUCKMAN, Interview, August 2008**

Forty members of the Medical Association for Prevention of War march to the site in the morning, joining a large number of protesters attempting to take up Sir William Key's offer of a tour of the exhibition. In the end only four people from religious organisations and MAPW are allowed on site. Despite having her own pre-purchased pass, WA Greens Senator Jo Vallentine is refused entry.

"Keys cut an impressive figure — especially for those of us trained for the brotherhood of the Right and the Fair. Elderly, erudite and charming. The consummate well bred bulldog. Fought for his country twice and wounded once. Having established that our small group contained no 'thugs and terrorists' he engaged us in discussion for something like an hour.

Steadily the urge to vomit spread through me as, with due deference and decorum, this master of self-righteousness and fair play demonstrated the

well honed skills of the public school debater. I will attempt to do the argument justice(!)...

1. Above all, no one, no one, is more committed to peace than we old soldiers and arms dealers. (I was to hear this line from various persons at least ten times in the next two hours.)

2. We need a vigorous home-grown arms industry: (a) for self defence; (b) to ensure us major power status in our region; (c) to benignly influence military-political developments therein.

3. We never, never, never, provide weapons or know-how to repressive regimes. (Only to good folk like the French- in Kanaky? Papua New Guinea- in Bougainville? British- in Northern Ireland? and the USA- almost everywhere).

4. When we do, (Whoops!) they assure us that they never use our goods and skills for repressive purposes (e.g. the ammunition we sold to Indonesia was only used for naval target practice).

Much weight was supposed to accrue to his case by the 'hypothetical': 'Let me put this to you, Ladies and Gentlemen-what would you propose should the Indonesians invade (wait for it ... guess who) Papua New Guinea?' The Indonesian bogey reigns supreme (hypothetically of course!), never mind that the Indonesians have already invaded West Papua and East Timor and what did Australia do then? This 'hypothetical' Indonesian invasion of Papua New Guinea is, of course, a front for the real cause celebre of Australian militarism — an Indonesian invasion of Australia. Though dismissed by serious defence analysts time and again in the last ten years, this bogey continues to shape our militarists' designs as evinced by the flagrant anti-Indonesian styling of Kangaroo 89 [military exercises]. It seems the only factor outweighing fear of Indonesian invasion is fear of incurring the wrath of the US State Department for not toeing the line.

Intermittently one of our group would attempt to redirect the discussion towards the actual on-the-ground implications of the exhibits, but at the mention of words like 'death' or 'killing' Keys would interrupt and divert with the protestation that 'now you are using emotive language'. This would then be a signal for him to recite the catechism 'most of these items have civilian applications — are you suggesting that Australian manufacturers be prevented from advertising legitimate civil wares?'

This was apparently an effective argument — particularly for people who didn't have the opportunity to see the exhibition. A few protesters I spoke to had obviously been left unsure about just what was in the exhibition, indeed it was a clever attempt as far as P.R. goes. There were numerous basically 'civilian' stalls — the biggest display of Sidchrome spanners I have ever seen, for example, Wattle Paints (who supplied sun hats to the police as a side line) and Price Waterhouse accounting systems. Then there were more ambiguous displays — items like life rafts or radar systems which obviously have dual applicability. But the main hall was replete with stalls and displays, overloaded with machinery and systems with one purpose — killing people ... pardon my emotions!

British Aerospace had a missile cutely labeled 'fire and forget', right next to a display of a rocket launcher, one of whose practical features was 'environmental protection'. Numerous items were advertised in terms of their

superior performance relative to competitors in the Falklands 'conflict' or the Gulf War. Rockwell International even had a sort of mock-up military man's cubby house: 'Command and control centre as used in Operation Desert Storm' — walk right in, sit right down, baby let your hair hang down. Even the smooth operators, Nobeltech of Sweden, did a beaut line in 'effective concepts in passive counter measures'. This was part of their display of one of their latest missiles; a full scale real life version of which sat at the front of their stall.

I hesitantly approached the front man on a French stall flogging 'the communication system which outperformed the Americans in the Gulf', to ask whether he felt uneasy selling a product in terms of its ability to outkill competitors:

Response No. 1: 'Pardon?'

Repeat question. Response No. 2: 'I am just selling my product best way I know how'.

He's right of course: business is business and death makes us dollars."

**BILL WILLIAMS, 'The Fire and Forget Fair', Chain Reaction #65, March 1992**

During the day police make various forays into the campsite. In one incident, captured on the evening news, a police motorcyclist runs over a protester while in another two undercover police assault a woman before arresting and pressing charges against her. Debate breaks out between the police and the camp's organisers over whether this and other police actions breach an earlier agreement not to enter the camp, and indeed over whether any such agreement had ever been made.

"Forty OSG robots dashed from the AIDEX compound and attempted to push [into] the protest camp. Activists [rushed forward] and managed to hold firm. This followed other incidents of harassment such as preventing hygiene services emptying site portaloos, entering the camp at night claiming they had heard reports of firearms in the camp (they were politely told the only firearms here were across the road at AIDEX), and a police vehicle speeding dangerously along the length of the camp. The driver when confronted claimed he was lost!"

**LEANNE BOOTH, 'Anti-AIDEX Protests', Peace Courier, 1992**

Throughout the day police remove protesters from the road only to see them return and the process start over again. Sometimes the police remove people individually using martial arts holds while in other cases they rush the crowd violently.

"On the Tuesday the police were spear tackling protesters into the tarmac. That really freaked me out and made me incredibly angry. They didn't need to do it because we saw on the Thursday after the wedding that they could professionally handle demonstrators, but the rest of the time they were being vicious bastards."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE K, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"Protesters were blockading the road, and we [2SER journalists] attempted to cover the event. We began to walk towards a cluster of journalists and camera people who had gathered near the blockade.

We were immediately intercepted by two police officers who told us that they feared for the safety of Annamarie's child, Karina, and that we should move out of the area. We thanked them and continued to walk towards the media who were gathered on one side of the road. The police followed and kept on asking Annamarie to move out of the area. Annamarie responded by saying that she would take responsibility for her child. They refused to accept this and gave her an order to move out of the way or they would call in officers to have her removed. She continued to argue her position with them. I also argued with them. We told them that we were journalists. They told us they didn't care who we were.

Finally, Annamarie decided to comply and was in the process of moving out of the area. At the same time, however, they had brought in the OSG, who demanded that I move out of the area as well. Surprised, I refused, stating that I was a journalist and had a right to report on what was happening.

But I was grabbed by two OSG officers, who promptly bent my wrists and twisted my arms. I yelled, 'Let me go!' The officer said 'Are you going to come quietly or am I going to do this?' -- giving me a Chinese burn. I repeated 'I am a journalist and have a right to be here.' They increased their force and I increased my protests. I screamed from the pain and they continued to inflict more pain and violence upon me.

They lifted me up and I fell to the ground. I got up and they grabbed my arms again and kept twisting and twisting. I screamed and protested. They led me to the paddy wagon and there twisted my arms and wrists much much harder. I thought my arms were about to break and I screamed loudly. The officer told me to stop screaming.

I was arrested and charged with resisting arrest and obstructing a vehicle. To my memory, there were no vehicles in the area.

Annamarie had been pushed out of the way. Three officers covered her view until they pushed her a distance away from where I was. She was then pushed again by another OSG officer until she was on the highway. Her questions were unanswered, her pleas ignored.

When she recovered, she asked police at the protest site of my whereabouts. They seemed not to know. Even the police at the station where I was held seemed not to know.

It was five hours before I was released. My appearance in court ended with a \$500 bail, forfeited if I returned to the AIDEX site. Subsequent attempts and pressure by 2SER (the station for which I work) to revoke this condition were fruitless...

Other media people were harassed. Some were pulled by the nape of the neck and thrown out of the way, some punched or thrown into the crowds. Another public radio journalist from Melbourne was harassed by DESIKO security and a 'friendly' media official. He was stopped from attending the press conference until it was nearly over.

The media were often herded away by police when protest actions took place. Many protesters have claimed that a lot of violence often took place then."

**NADYA STANI, 'The Free Media Meet Canberra Cops', Green Left Weekly, 11 December 1991**

"The cops' response to our blockading was flat out brutality. The law had failed so muscle was to be employed. Not one of the people I knew at the protest came out of it without getting hurt in some way. Hundreds of minor and serious injuries were sustained on our side, a hand full amongst the cops, usually because they fell over during one of their charges. One mate was king hit in the face, one had hair ripped out, one was knocked out and another had her arm broken.

In dealing with the daily blockading the police employed a ritual in which the officers would first bring out the uniformed cops and then follow them up with the riot police. They'd stand them in the sun for at least an hour or two whilst we held the road. There would be people drumming and shouting and dancing and people hassling them and they'd have to stand there bolt upright and try and avoid arguing with us too much about why they were there. Reasons given included 'Overtime', 'I only care about bringing food home for my family' and 'I hate you arseholes.' Then when they were about to boil over they'd be ordered to put on latex gloves. This in turn would arc up the tension amongst the protestors who knew they were getting ready to draw blood.

Then when things reached breaking point they would get their order and just run amok shoving and punching and dragging people off the road. Eventually they would push the majority of us back before mopping up the few remaining stragglers and those daring enough to rush back into the fray. The protestors would rest up and get their strength back before retaking the road. Sometimes when this happened the cops would just shove the gloves back on and lay into the crowd immediately.

There were also weird things going on. I was on one picket line with a woman who'd been dragged off in the middle of the night and beaten up by what she figured were off duty cops. Others reported seeing weirdoes dressed up in ninja gear threatening people on the outskirts of the camp. It was hard to tell how much of this stuff was just rumours, but there were probably boys from the Defence Academy coming down to get their kicks."

**"CHRIS", Interview, May 2008**

"Some people formed into catchers. I heard one person in court when asked if anything was thrown say 'Yes, protesters.' Continually instead of dumping people by the side of the road the police would throw them into the dirt, often head first. We formed into a group to help catch them. A positive thing was that people were so committed that they would go out onto the road again and again."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE L, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"There was a lot of fear, fear and strength. You had to find ways to stand up to the police because there was no one else looking out for the protesters other than the protesters."

**LAURA MACFARLANE, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

During the blockading of Flemington Road the police refuse to allow water and food in to the pickets labelling thrown oranges as "missiles" for the benefit of their press releases. Following a storm, during which a "dancing blockade occurs", a lull in the action sets in before the road is once more violently cleared around 5pm.

"One group broke through the cordon, but the police pushed the majority back and they were isolated behind police lines. They just left the protesters there for hours in the sun and wouldn't let anyone bring food or water through to them. People started lobbing oranges to them and the police were doing their best to stop them getting through. One policeman caught an orange and then bowed to the protesters at which point another splattered over his head. The crowd hugely enjoyed that (laughter)."

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

"On the Tuesday afternoon it began raining. Canberra can be a pretty gloomy place when it's grey and raining so it set the scene for the protest because the weather made the event look even more like death than usual (laughter). At about 4pm it poured down and as the rain picked up a lot of people moved back from the main gate to take shelter under a tree.

The police were chuckling and saying 'You're not so tough as you make about to be', which the demonstrators didn't care about because nothing was happening and they couldn't see any point in standing out there and getting wet. Meanwhile the rain got heavier and heavier and the police got wetter and wetter and their spirits got damper as well. They were all looking at each other waiting for the word from the one grand poobah out there. Eventually the poobah gave them the nod and they slunk over to the tree and stood with the demonstrators (laughter). The police were keeping very quiet and the demonstrators were saying 'You're not going to crack any heads under here are you?' and 'See, we're not as bad as you thought.'"

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE F, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"On our way to the dancing blockade, we find a circle of people, arms round one another, saying, 'We are twenty four people living and working for a world without violence'. We add ourselves to their number, and more and more join us until we are 'Forty people living and working for a world without violence'. We sing a couple of songs, do a whoosh and break up. It feels good, lightening the mood.

After the OSG close in that day, I spend time offering people a little comfort even if it is only a barley sugar. The road and campsite are full of red-eyed, shocked people, especially young people. One young woman comes up beside me and begins to scream abuse at the police, especially to give a message to cop number X who had told her his number as he choked her. She is completely distraught. I put my arm around her and ask her if she wants a hug. She cries a little, but is too vagued out with grief to really connect. She continues to cry and yell as I stroke her hair - it has been pouring down and she is soaking wet. Eventually she begins to say 'They're taking away our hope...' and I say, 'No, they can't do that, they can only try' - she crumples against me and begins to cry again. 'They can, they can take our lives, they can take our possessions, they can take our dignity. They've bashed us, they've kicked us, they've abused us...' Another woman standing by says with me that they can't take our dignity. I say 'All that shows that they've lost their dignity. There's no loss of dignity in you...' Eventually she decides to go. I give her a barley sugar.

Women are talking to the cops. One thanks one cop in particular for



throwing her into another cop's waiting elbow. He assures her it was his pleasure. I feel my own despair so totally for a while that I can't sing, though I think it would be a good thing if I could."

**MARY HEATH, 'Protest Opposing AIDEX', Unpublished article, 1991**

A book launch about the arms trade and a small youth rally are held in the city in the evening whilst William Keys engages in a formal debate with Graeme Cheeseman from the Peace Research Centre. During the campsite's evening meeting debates continue as to the ensuing direction and purpose of the protest, but the gathering is unable to come to any agreement.

"The International Socialists dominated the Tuesday night meeting, as with subsequent meetings by speaking loudest and longest. Attempts at facilitation were at best, well intentioned but ineffective, and at worst biased towards the International Socialists. The ISO were determined that the camp remain 'unified' and that everyone be involved blockading. They used tactics such as placing people through the crowd to make their numbers seem stronger, stirring up the crowd and, when things went against them, creating a diversion so the whole group would go running towards perceived threats...

The group's strength lay not in its ability to sit on a road and beaten up, but in the power of so many people coming together from so many different backgrounds with the united goal of wanting to close down AIDEX and end Australia's export of militarism. Collectively the potential for so many different types of actions over Canberra was enormous...

The decision making forums needed to follow some format and obviously needed to address the issue of the disruptive tactics of the ISO. These meetings should have also had a greater emphasis on information sharing rather than being a forum for those in control of the megaphone or those best skilled in crowd manipulation. Because of this kind of domination and the violent agenda being set by the police over the road it was impossible to have the necessary rational discussions about tactics and how to carry through actions that were proposed on the draft agenda. A possible way of avoiding these problems would have been to have people organised in affinity groups, and ensuring structures were in place to enable easy access to information and decision making processes so that the group could have control of the agenda rather than it be controlled by individuals."

**LOUISE MACDONALD, 'How Was AIDEX?', Chain Reaction #65, March 1992**

"Louise insults many of the protesters at AIDEX by saying they were manipulated by the ISO. The mass of people at AIDEX came with the intention of shutting it down and were prepared to stand up to police violence to achieve that. Give them the credibility they deserve... Louise makes it sound as if the ISO is a well oiled machine, semi-secret machine. It is laughable- ISO members often argued openly and publicly against each other over what to do next. Our caucuses were always held in the open and many non-members joined in.

AIDEX was the greatest victory for the Left in a decade, that is why sections of the media tried to discredit it as a simply a riot of disreputable hooligans. We

expect this from them, but would expect better from those who supported the protest. There were differences of opinion in the camp, which were argued out at many meetings. But now those disagreements are not central.

The courage, enthusiasm and determination of people at the protest are what mattered. This is the lifeblood needed to rebuild a Left capable of giving a lead in resisting the horrors of the so-called New World Order. That is why it is worth defending the AIDEX protest, not denigrating the participants as if they were manipulated into misguided actions.”

**PENNY MCDONALD and SANDRA BLOODWORTH, Letter, Chain Reaction #66, April 1992**

“I thought the debate that erupted in Green Left Weekly and elsewhere between the pacifist types and the ISO claiming that the latter took over the protest was really overblown. The ISO were definitely there trying to recruit along and sell papers with the other Socialists, but to say that they dominated or led the protest in a violent or confrontational direction was a bit much.

They probably would have loved to be in charge and I’m sure they did their best to swing things their way. I did see some of them ranting through their megaphones and doing sneaky things like placing their members all around the mass meetings instead of a group so that they’d get more of a say and people would get the impression that a variety of people shared their ideas. I think a lot of people saw through that though and in the end most people did the mass blockading thing not because someone with a megaphone told them to, but because they’d come with the intention of blockading and because, despite the police violence, it worked.

For ideological types like the NVDAers, and Socialists for that matter, if people don’t agree with them or don’t act in the prescribed way then it’s not their formula that’s at fault it’s something that’s wrong with the people. If the police hit us over the head it’s not because that’s their job, but because we failed to follow the NVDA formula to the letter. In this case they wanted to believe that their ideas weren’t embraced because people fell for another lot of ideologues, the ISO. In the end, like at the later S11 protest, most people didn’t fit neatly into anyone’s boxes, they just did what seemed most sensible and useful at the time. Sometimes that aligned with the ISO’s view, sometimes it aligned with others, but it’s not like they were being ordered around like robots.”

**“CHRIS”, Interview, July 2008**

“I’ve organized and attended many of these mass protests and blockades and they are never smooth operations. They all descend into hours and hours of interminable discussion. Everybody comes from a different viewpoint and few people are prepared to say ‘We’ll do it your way today and maybe I’ll get my way tomorrow.’ Most people want it done their way and it takes an enormous time to come to an agreement.

Given all that however AIDEX ‘91 was particularly bad in this respect. I think RAAF bear some responsibility because there could have been more thought and planning put into the communication and decision making structures. I think there was a need for an organizing committee and an information clearinghouse and there was no such thing.

Because there was a vacuum it allowed a group like the ISO to dominate the incoherent and interminable community meetings that did happen. Because they had little or nothing to do with the organizing of the protest they arrived with plenty of energy and brought along megaphones and their own marquee. It was a classic piece of ambush marketing where they took an issue and turned it to their benefit for the sake of recruiting. With their discipline they easily took over the running of the meetings whereas normally you would have had a different group from a different place doing that each day. Since they were the most organized faction they were able to have a much bigger influence than their numbers would or should have otherwise allowed.

Nevertheless it's easy to be wise after the event. We didn't envisage that the police would be so rough and the media so negative. People were under enormous pressure and a lack of any form of decision making structure meant that our reaction to the police was sporadic and disorganized."

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

## **WEDNESDAY 27TH NOVEMBER**

A Women's Day Of Action sees over 150 women meet at the Canberra War Memorial before marching to Civic for a protest. After a ceremony songs are sung and prayers given before those taking part head back to the NATEX site.

"To me the most successful action that I experienced during six days at AIDEX was the women's action. The reason for its success was that the action had been thoroughly planned in advance. All the participants had to do was to experience the joy of its unfolding.

The action started at 7.00 am outside the War Memorial in Canberra, where the women gathered to share breakfast under large trees. Then we arranged ourselves in two circles for singing, talking, prayers, crying, grief and laughing ceremonies and yelling out the names of the woman we wished to be remembered forever. We paraded into the city, where women speakers educated us about the cost of war. We showed our anger, we sang and danced.

When we arrived back at the chaos of AIDEX, we gathered under the trees and sang and then proceeded to decorate the National Exhibition Centre fence with symbols and messages of our feelings and thoughts against war. We sang more and danced. We united and finished the action.

I was overwhelmed by strength after the action; my soul was flying. There had been no ordering, only suggestions and trust. There was space to channel many emotions, unlike the other actions where only anger was released. We communicated and united together - feeling our connections with the Greenham Common women and the other women activists who had come before us. For the first time at AIDEX, I felt truly peaceful, feeling that I was an example of what peace is.

I felt that splitting from the main group and not compromising my beliefs was the right thing to do. I felt united with the women. That was so important after struggling to communicate unsuccessfully with the main group. Everyone had had something to say but no-one was listening.

To me the women's action was the only truly nonviolent action at AIDEX. It was educational, creative, supportive and well planned. We didn't have to put our lives on the line to show our disapproval of AIDEX. The other actions were creating violence in that there was even more psychological injury than mere physical injury. The women's action was a manifestation of peace, healing and growth. We had to break away from the patriarchal dominance that was infesting both sides of the NATEX fence."

**KATHLYN ROSETTA, 'Anti-AIDEX Women's Action', Nonviolence Today #23, Jan/Feb 1992**

"The women's actions are powerful. We share breakfast and break into groups, telling each other our names, where home is, why we have come to AIDEX and to the women's action. We are many. We stand in a circle outside the war memorial, singing, reading. The monument outside says 'Their names shall live forevermore.'

A woman speaks of feeling that our voices and our stories are not part of the war memorial and we spend a silent time thinking on our hopes and dreams for a peaceful future and of the women who have inspired us to make peace. We spend time telling each other what we have brought to AIDEX - our dreams, our skills - and appreciating each other. Then we turn toward parliament house and shout the names of women who have inspired us and supported us, women we know who would have liked to have been here, our own names. We close with a song and walk off, colourful, to Garema Place. More songs, street theatre. I lead singing at Garema Place, and women are dancing."

**MARY HEATH, 'Protest Opposing AIDEX 1991', Unpublished, 1991**

"The accusation [made by a writer in an earlier issue of Chain Reaction] that the ISO attacked the women's day of action because it was 'divisive, cowardly and irrelevant' is wrong. We think it is fantastic to have a women's action, our objection was political.

The main activities were praying, keening, dancing and weaving. This promoted women as peace-loving, earthy, emotional and passive- the same old stereotypes which the women's movement rejected twenty years ago. It fed right into the sexism of the camp which said women shouldn't be on the frontlines because it might get violent."

**PENNY MCDONALD and SANDRA BLOODWORTH, Letter, Chain Reaction #66, April 1992, p 2**

"It was really good to go on the women's action. I woke up that morning to the usual sirens and everyone going 'Quick, quick there's a confrontation going on.' It was a dilemma in deciding on whether to leave the site because there were already people being violently apprehended and pulled off the road and trouble was brewing, but I thought 'I've got to get my focus back, I've got to start the day on a positive note for a change.' Three of us joined the others at the War Memorial and it was good to change the emphasis from instead of 'our glorious dead who've performed heroics in war' to mourning all the victims of war and the very act of war. Because we were mourning that it was very important to have women's input into that and to honour women who had worked for

peace and who were absent, but supporting us. We said their names and sang songs and held candles and the whole feeling was turned around from panic and anger to a real joy to being amongst women. That was reflected when we marched into Civic. My boyfriend who'd been picking up supplies for the camp said it was really amazing to see us march in because the feeling was so different to what he'd left at the camp, it made him really optimistic and brought a smile to his face."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE F, Skid Row**

Back at the campsite, following a morning meeting with more debates over tactics, protesters retake the road. During the action one blockader is tipped out of a wheelchair by police and left on the road for a period of time. Police also forcibly remove a Uniting Church Minister when he attempts to get water to sweltering picketers. Meanwhile Sir William Keys takes another 12 protesters, accompanied by former police and ex-Army security guards, on a tour of the exhibition as attendees continue to be mobbed and harassed outside.

"A man in his wheelchair was tipped out of his wheelchair because he wouldn't move from a sit-in. He was quite injured because he was a paraplegic and had no way of protecting his fall. It was devastating to think that human beings could act that way to other human beings."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE C, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"Al had been thrown out of his wheelchair and onto the road and was in shock. I arranged a lift to hospital, and some lunch since he hadn't eaten for more than 12 hours, and just sat comforting him. There he was, none of his friends with him, most having been arrested, wearing his 'Smash the state' T-shirt which details the sins of the state: 'The state is: sexist racist greedy violent homophobic cruel to animals destructive of the environment'. He said eventually 'How can we have faith in this system?' and was on the verge of tears. I told him he was welcome to cry, he said 'I'm trying'. Ach, my heart nearly broke. I still need a bloody good cry."

**MARY HEATH, 'Protest Opposing AIDEX 1991', Unpublished article, 1991**

"There was a picket line with about 60 people sitting peacefully in front of a gate. They sat there with no shade in the 30 or 40 degree heat for hours and anyone who tried to give them water or food was arrested. A priest who tried to deliver water was arrested. People who tried to cross the road were also attacked by dogs."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE A, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"I don't believe in blockading and sitting on the road, but I believe less in depriving people of water. As one of the RSL protesters said 'Even in the concentration camps they gave us water.' We tried for five minutes to get permission from the police but they were adamant. So there really was nothing left but to make a run for it. And my hours of watching the World Series rugby matches really paid off. I quite surprised myself- I must have made about fifteen metres. My only regret is that the TV cameras didn't get any footage of the dash. All they got were shots of a breathless 62 year old being bundled into the paddy

wagon, thus ending my brief excursion into the realms of rugby football. The senior officer of the OSG wasn't too impressed and asked whether I could outrun a bullet. I didn't know what to make of the comment. I still don't."

**NEVILLE WATSON, 'A Picket Line Prayer', Nonviolence Today #24, January/February 1992**

"Things were getting tense. The police had decided to remove people from the roadblock. As they began this some of us let out cries of 'CHARGE!' and we did exactly that. The coppers were scared. You could see it in their eyes; see it in their actions. We were charging at the coppers and splitting up their line. People were getting onto the road and running about...

Some coppers punched us and some of us punched coppers. The situation lasted about five or ten minutes until most people then sat on the road... They then tried to move us; we were all revved up and none too willing to move. We weren't so bloody peaceful either, much to the disappointment of the NVDA lot. Arms and legs were locked everywhere. The cops managed to move some of us and those they couldn't they punched and strangled and pulled their hair until they were able to drag them away. A few scuffles broke out. People were angry and rightly so. An arsehole of a copper (aren't they all?) started laying into the person beside me so I grabbed his arm and shouted at him. He stopped punching and managed to drag the person off the road. It took police about fifteen minutes to get us all off the road."

**KEEF AGRO, 'A Story About AIDEX Canberra 1991', Burning Issue #3, April 1992**

"Once it was set up the protesters were mainly trying to block the arms buyers and others from getting in. They might turn up in a car and people would just surge in around them. As they walked inside a crowd would debate them about what they were doing there. A few of them turned around and said they were leaving and everyone cheered."

**SAM LORD, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

"I remember the attendees running the gauntlet of the protesters. Some of them were just tragic and I thought 'You are the arseholes I thought you would be' whilst I looked at others and wondered what they were doing there. A number were turned away or just left because they didn't want to deal with us. Some people were spitting at them, which I wasn't too fond of, but mainly people just yelled in their faces. Others tried to have a more rational discussion and talk them out of attending."

**SUSAN LUCKMAN, Interview, August 2008**

"A demonstrator saw one of the war-mongers walking down the street with his bag of goodies (AIDEX promotional gear) and ran up behind him and nicked them. He ran into the camp and was chased by a few coppers who in turn we chased out by an even larger group of demonstrators."

**KEEF AGRO, 'A Story About AIDEX Canberra 1991', Burning Issue #3, April 1992**

The protesters taking part in the Women's Day Of Action reconvene at NATEX at 12.30pm to decorate the fence with flowers, crepe paper, banners, postcards and

posters. During the weaving of material into the fence the police step in bizarrely stating that this is an attempt to “electrify” it, claims they later repeat to the media.

“The women were weaving and had balls of wool. They were also throwing them to make shapes and one of the balls went over the electric wires and it looked nice, it had a nice shape to it (laughter) so they threw a few more balls over and then went on weaving. The police then said that if this was modern metallic wool it could bring the power down if it managed to get into the fence. They went berserk. It was absolute stupidity (laughter).”

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE H, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

In the afternoon the protesters retake the initiative by moving away from Flemington Road to march along Northborne Avenue and block traffic traveling to Sydney. The police do not make arrests, but continue to roughly treat and in some cases bash protesters.

“There wasn’t a fifty-fifty split, not all of the women went off on the women’s march. There was a pretty heavy confrontation at the Western gate and then everyone came back into the camp as it had all gotten a bit too much. There was a big meeting and that decided to have a march and by that time the women’s group had arrived back. They joined in the big march and everyone was together again.”

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE D, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

“For me it felt great being part of the march. We met it coming back off the bus. There were people skipping in front of the police, literally skipping so the police couldn’t grab them.”

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE F, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

“That was very important for boosting people’s morale because after being there for three days we were feeling exhausted. There were a lot of people who’d been there longer than us and who felt really tired and frustrated and hurt. When we got out onto [Northborne Ave] we were able to show the people of Canberra what was really going on because when we were on [Flemington road] no one could see what was happening to the protesters. Everyone’s spirits were lifted and it felt more unified so that when we sat down in front of the gate again people felt more powerful again, that we weren’t just like lambs to the slaughter, but were making a difference, taking a stand again.”

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE C, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

“During one of the big movements of people I remember hearing over the police walkie talkies that they had declared a State of Emergency. Being the cynical types that we were myself and my friends were wondering whether this was a fictitious ruse by the police to get us to back down. As it turned out it wasn’t true. I’d never seen the police go to such lengths before to deceive protesters.”

**LAURA MACFARLANE, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

“A demonstrator announced that Shell gate was under attack by police who were removing a barricade that had been erected earlier in the week. Part of





The AIDEX fences get redecorated (Susan Luckman)



The women are watching (Jules McLellan)

the barricade was a burnt out car which had been placed in front of the gate and then set alight. Hot on the trail a group of us got down there quick smart and told the pigs were to go.

Ten minutes later another two groups containing about 15 people each arrived and we fixed up the barricades as best we could. The AIDEX Response Group was in fine form!"

**KEEF AGRO, 'A Story About AIDEX Canberra 1991', Burning Issue #3, April 1992**

"Things were as ever pretty confusing. At one point people were proposing we march on Canberra to protest against police violence because they didn't think the police would dare bash us in sight of the public. That seemed to be the go when the call went out that Shell Gate was being evicted causing the crowd to march there.

When we got to Shell Gate it was all over. Some of the ferals and punks started climbing the fence saying 'Let's go in and trash the thing.' During the whole protest this was the only time I really saw a sizeable number of demonstrators willing to go on the offensive against the other side and this only came after they had mauled us for days on end. AIDEX now reminds me of the later anti-globalisation protests in Seattle and Washington DC in that the small amount of property damage and fighting back received all the news coverage, but our numbers and determination to go back out onto the road again and again were what really carried the day.

People started passionately debating the pros and cons of a site invasion, but in the distance you could see loads of security and cops heading across the fields with dogs. I was in favour of going inside, but when I saw them I realized that while we probably could get away with it we would take a lot of hits in the process. I don't know what the majority thought, but the cops made up our minds for us in the end by flooding the area."

**"CHRIS", Interview, July 2008**

In the mid-afternoon a civil marriage ceremony is held outside the Middle Gate between Jan and Jacob Grech, two of the key protest organisers. During the vows the OSG are brought in and begin ordering people to leave the road, knocking over a pastor in the process. Following some argument the police eventually stop 10 metres away from the wedding party and following its conclusion take a softer approach in removing protesters due to the presence of the media. However, later in the day dogs are brought in to intimidate the protesters, some of whom are bitten.

"With the wedding and other events we wanted to create some actions that laughed in the face of the arms industry. The arms industry is there totally to promote and profit from aggression and fear on a macro level. On a micro level by getting angry and belting your hands into doors and pulling apart fences, whilst that's all useful, if that's all you're doing you're falling within the arms trade's gamut. So what RAAF tried to do all through the campaign was to inject fun, merriment, joy and affirmation of the good things in life as a juxtaposition to the evils of the arms industry."

**JACOB GRECH, Radio 3CR, December 2008**



The wedding (Jules McLellan)



The bridal party (Jules McLellan)

"In the middle of the marriage process the OSG really wanted to bust up the group because they didn't want everyone to have this fun, especially the people who had been driving them nuts. They started doing their 'Hut hut hut' bit and pushing around the edges, but there were too many people and they backed off."

**COLM MCNAUGHTON, Radio 3CR, December 2008**

"One of the worst things I saw involved a Uniting Church Minister I know from Newcastle who had already been injured in an earlier melee with the police. He was standing on one crutch and held up his hand to say 'Stop! This is a scared wedding. You can't come any closer.' He was knocked to the ground and walked over and his crutch picked up and thrown over a hedge. I had a flash that this is how these people are trained and that if they had guns they'd probably shoot people. They were so lacking in decency that they could do anything."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE L, Skid Row**

"That afternoon after the wedding there was so much media attention that the OSG were really gentle in comparison (laughter)."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE E, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"I thought the feeling of togetherness was very powerful on the Wednesday as everyone was sitting down and others were racing around to support them. You couldn't wear your hats and sunglasses because you didn't know when the police would take them from you whilst in the process of removing you from the road. People were making paper hats and bringing around fruit and food."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE C, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"Sometimes the OSG would grab men and women by the face and sometimes they would just go berserk and run into the crowd and throw people into the bushes. Because of the media coverage though they were doing what they were meant to be which was asking people if they would leave and if they wouldn't picking them up gently and carrying them off."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE C, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

During the day volunteers continue to staff the First Aid tent tending to injured protesters. With the aid of two Justices of the Peace they also begin collecting statutory declarations and other evidence of police violence for use in Parliament and future legal action.

"The Democrats Senator Sid Spindler had asked a couple of us from NUS to come and visit him to talk about the protest. He'd seen the violence on the news, but said he needed more concrete evidence before he could ask questions or make a statement in Parliament. The ethnographer in me had already been thinking about documenting what was going on. He let us use his resources and we knocked up a Statutory Declaration form and ran off a few hundred copies.

We put out a call at the Wednesday meeting for lawyers and found some as well as a couple of JPs. We began recording people's experiences of police violence and had someone in the Information/First Aid tent at all times. There wasn't a specific plan at that point to lodge a complaint to the Ombudsman.



However we could see that people wanted their voices to be heard and we knew that this information would be valuable beyond the life of the protest, and it was important to collect it while it was still fresh. It was quite a full on emotional thing as we were affirming people's experiences of this horrific violence and watching them release all this pain and anger. I also ran around taking lots of photos because this was before the time of social networking sites and unlike today there were hardly any cameras there.

We took the Stat Decs off site each day to where we were billeted. I remember being really nervous when we finally left Canberra because my car was conspicuously covered in political stickers and had out of town license plates. We still didn't know what we were going to use the Decs for and I was worried they would get confiscated because the police were giving people grief as they drove back to Sydney and Melbourne. I think we lifted up the back seat and hid them under there with my sister sitting on them for the ride home."

**SUSAN LUCKMAN, Interview, August 2008**

"I go to the tent and end up spending hours giving first aid, treating a broken wrist among other injuries, taking statutory declarations (and making one), arranging lifts to hospital, administering glasses of water, trying to help people find lost property, especially glasses. There are several mangled pairs in the info tent. People are in complete shock, not able to think, most injured more or less severely. I saw horrible injuries and bruising, took statutory declarations from people who'd been severely hurt or who were bringing film of people being bashed, including a man who thought he had photographed a woman having her back broken as she was thrown onto the shoulder of the road."

**MARY HEATH, 'Protest Opposing AIDEX 1991', Unpublished article, 1991**

At the regular evening meeting a split occurs amongst the protesters. A group of NVDA oriented people announce that they will hold a separate meeting the next morning with the goal of organising an action with strict rules around protester behaviour. Meanwhile a number of protesters attend a hardcore punk gig in the city featuring Mutiny, Deviant Kickback and others.

"Unlike at the Kev Carmody gig [the next night] the cops didn't show and the gig was one of the best of my life. Everyone went in tired and worn out, but the bands played intense sets and fired us up to get out there again for the next day."

**"CHRIS", Interview, July 2008**

## **THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 28TH**

As proposed earlier in the year by FOE the final day of the protest carries the theme of the "Arms Trade and the Environment." During the day the Weapons In The Wilderness book is launched at Parliament where MAPW members also hold a protest. Another protest is also held against the Conference on Space Research at ANU, where the police block an attempt by a law lecturer to hold an alternative conference in his office.

Two meetings are held at the NATEX site in the morning. With the protest split the NVDA oriented group go on to hold an environmental rally with speeches. They

then march in single file past the police to hang banners on the Northborne Avenue fence while the rest of the protest continues to block the road.

"By the end it split into two factions, two basic camps- people who wanted to stand by the side of the road and show their presence and those who wanted to be part of sit-ins, marches and blockades. When that happened the two groups went and did those things and it was very effective."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE D, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"Our numbers were low so we decided against mass roadblocks as these would be removed easily. I would say there were only about 200 active demonstrators left when the group split in two. The division seems to have been caused by the NVDA contingent who were having a meeting and decided that chants, dancing and fast drum beats were aggressive. This being against their philosophy meant that if you did want to work with them you were left with few forms of resistance apart from 'group therapy.'

So with about 100 or so of us who wanted to get on with the job of stuffing up AIDEX we decided to divide ourselves up into small groups of about 25 people each. We took off through the back of the campsite yelling, screaming and howling. We made it to the highway and the nearest copper was a 100 metres away so we all sat down and blocked the road. When they got their fat arses up there we got up and left; all the while being as rowdy as possible. We ran back into the trees which formed the back of the campsite. Police on motorcycles began to ride around us at unsafe speeds and one of our lot was hit by a pig on a bike.

One particular copper who kept circling our group and abusing us was asked for his number. He replied '4946, fuckwit.' Then the chanting started: '4946... Officer Fuckwit!' Our group ran and up down the side of the road a few more times making as much noise as possible. Although all we did was block the road on one occasion, and even then for not very long, the tactic worked very well in diverting police attention from the main area of action."

**KEEF AGRO, 'A Story About AIDEX Canberra 1991', Burning Issue #3, April 1992**

"On the last day of AIDEX, some hard-line supporters of Non-Violent Action (NVA) held a protest for which they banned chanting, and ordered participants to wash their hair and dress respectably for the media. This tokenistic action had the effect of splitting the camp."

**INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANISATION, 'The Lessons Of AIDEX', ISO, 1992**

"On the last day, tired of the abuse, with 70 others I chose some guidelines to mark the space where I wanted to be. There were four: using open body language, peaceful communication without abuse; avoiding chanting with the megaphone; using the megaphone only for the sharing of information and not for giving orders...

The guidelines unfortunately were expressed to the main group in a very negative way. This process of communication, where many people felt they were being told what to do, created a lot of unnecessary conflict. Again skilled, creative communication would have helped greatly. I felt comfortable, however, that I wanted to be with a particular group of people, and comfortable to state openly my agenda of nonviolence.

This broke open the simmering issue of 'unity' and 'diversity' within camp tactics. It was claimed by many that the nonviolent group was 'dividing' the camp. This in itself became a divisive tool, incensing people who were under the spell of the 'unity' assumption. That the group was always a 'united' mass was a myth perpetuated by people who believe unity of the 'left' is a necessity for social action organisation. The ISO, a prominent group, actively advocated what they termed 'mass militancy' encouraging everyone to do the same thing in the same place.

'We must appear united', I heard people say and yet it was clear that there were many different view-points and strategies for change. The AIDEX activist handbook: 'As the activists here have come from a broad range of political and social backgrounds it is unreasonable to think we're all going to draw similar conclusions from identical facts.'

**MARGARET PESTORIUS, 'An AIDEX Experience', Nonviolence Today #25, Mar/April 1992**

"The environment action, which became known as the non violent action, suffered, like the women's action the day before, from ISO attempts to railroad it. The action was organised to be an information sharing event (something seriously lacking through the week). It was not organised to run in opposition to the blockade, but as integral part of the protest. That morning's general meeting was dominated by the ISO. It was facilitated by an ISO member who made leading statements before and after speakers, giving preference to ISO speakers (carefully placed around the meeting) and refusing to give speaking rights to those opposing the ISO line... The meeting ended with those wanting to blockade marching off through the camp and the remaining people setting off to begin the environment action.

What began as a handful of people at the environment action quickly swelled to about 300. There were speakers on Australia's sale of arms to Malaysia and Indonesia and military spending in Australia... The protesters then began singing (with constant interruptions from the ISO people asking for quiet as they were holding a meeting ten metres from where the action was assembled). All those involved in the action then walked in single file, singing as they passed the police who lined the road to Northborne Avenue, where banners were painted and hung along the road past the exhibition. During the banner painting there was an open microphone which people used to speak on issues... The action ended with a discussion on where the \$20 million spent daily on the military in Australia could be better used."

**LOUISE MACDONALD, 'How Was AIDEX?', Chain Reaction #65, March 1992**

Keeping up the running Monty Python theme, the day sees injured protesters take part in a "Bring Out Your Dead" action named after a scene from 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail.' Numerous people carrying injuries ranging from scratches and bruises to broken bones and concussion lie down in a line to demonstrate the heavy toll the police have inflicted while others perform street theatre.

"After days of everyone being beaten up and getting broken bones and so forth we held a Bring Out Your Dead action. Someone got a bell and wandered



around the site crying out 'Bring our your dead, Bring our your dead!' Anyone who'd been injured came and lay down in a long, long line. It was a creative attempt to highlight the fact that the media had been obstinately ignoring the disproportionate and violent response of the police."

**"DELILAH", Interview, August 2008**

"We put out a press release about the Bring Out Your Dead action and it was pretty damning as in just one day there had been 6 broken arms, 3 broken legs and 30 people admitted to hospital for shock."

**FLICK RUBY, Interview, September 2008**

During the afternoon 30 "trades-people", mainly comprised of scabs working inside NATEX, hold a counter-demonstration carrying placards reading "Get Off The Drugs And Get A Job", "Go Home Rent-A-Crowd" and "Peace Is Nonviolence." After doing their piece for the media they quickly disperse.

"When the pro-AIDEX march came in there was a lot of verbal abuse against them and people got into yelling matches, but others came up and said 'You're just giving them what they want, ignore them.' People turned their backs on them and they didn't know what to do."

**FEMALE INTERVIEWEE I, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"We were told that we were dole bludgers when there was the anti-demonstration demonstration by the NATEX workers. A lot of them were telling us to get a job a lot of us were shouting back 'I'm a teacher', 'I'm a builder', 'I'm a this or that' to say that's not true. But at another level, even if it is true, one of the concerns we have is: If these young people are prepared to go to AIDEX, to risk not having much food... to sleep on a piece of blanket and stay 24 hours a day, day after day to try and stop the arms trade- and many of them were not very political, they just knew it was an arms thing, and they wanted to stop the killing- why should we denigrate them?"

**INTERVIEWEE, Piecing It Together: Hearing the Stories of AIDEX '91, Penniless Productions, 1995**

As the afternoon wears on people begin to leave the site, allowing the police outnumber the protesters for the first time. Between 5 and 8pm the police make a number of attempts to invade the campsite, but are pushed out on each occasion.

"It got a bit 'fear and loathing' towards dusk on that final day. Most people were clearing out and lone cops kept roaring into the campsite on motorbikes or stomping in on foot. We'd surround them and push them out, but with the numbers getting fewer and fewer it was getting pretty nerve wracking."

**"CHRIS", Interview, July 2008**

"On the Thursday, most people had left to return to their own parts of the country. The Adelaide contingent were due to leave by bus at seven that night. Late on Thursday afternoon the news flew about the campsite that off duty police would be returning with crowbars, etc that evening to clear the site of the 'vermin' in the shape of protesters. By this time, there were very few left,

and understandably, these few were highly concerned, there being children among the numbers.

Also, by this time it was unsafe for any protester to be alone in the vicinity, so two of us set off for the local phone box to inform the local Community Radio station of this latest threat. On the way to the phone, we passed a protester (male), who was abusing the police and passers-by through a megaphone. At this point in the proceedings I felt that there was no need for this kind of irresponsibility as it only endangered those few people who were remaining on the final night, largely unprotected. I remarked to my (male) companion that if this person was still masturbating via the megaphone on our return then I intended to confiscate it.

We made the call and returned to the campsite, once more passing the person. Speaking with him was a young mother. She was concerned for the safety of others and asked him to please stop this unproductive nonsense. The man was refusing in an amused sort of way...

At this stage, I intervened, pointing out that he was due to climb safely aboard his bus within an hour and had he not thought of the consequences that his actions might bring on other people. He told me, smirking, that if I couldn't cope, then I shouldn't be there in the first place. Fortunately for him I am basically a non-violent person, because I was sorely tempted to slap him! Instead, I confiscated the megaphone."

**WENDY JOSEPH, Letter, Green Left Weekly, 1 April 1992**

A Kev Carmody concert held in the city sees an aboriginal man arrested outside the venue, but he escapes after the audience pours into the street to wrestle with the police. The OSG arrive soon after and following the arrest of a small number of people, the crowd moves back inside.

Meanwhile, across town, the police parade "weapons" before the media, including kitchen knives, a spiked avocado pip and a spear gun, claiming protesters had laid traps and thrown acid at their officers during the week.

"[The next morning] Jacob and I and another person appeared on one of the morning news programs live from the camp. We were bleary, but unbowed. In the studio they had AFP Superintendent Alan Castles who said that protesters had been throwing acid and paint in condoms at the police. Jacob started to say 'Well Inspector I don't know what you fill your condoms with...' when the host cut him off. The laughter in the studio audience and from the crowd at the campsite was too loud for them to continue.

They then went on to display bits of wood with nails in them and wire that people used for toasting bread. All of these had obviously been taken from people's cars or the campsite or were just plants. I never saw anything like that used against the police. The only weapon I ever saw used against them were some little sticks that a small number of people threw when they became fed up with being bashed.

Nevertheless the police accusations were reported as facts. Some people from the protest tried to counter the lies, but the media moved on and the public was left with the impression that they were true."

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

## FRIDAY 29TH NOVEMBER

Police shoot a flare over the campsite around midnight, and then follow this up around 2.30am with a van playing bombing and military sounds at high volume. During the early hours of the morning the police are also seen rummaging through the campsite's bins to collect street theatre props as more evidence of "weapons." At dawn, the OSG roust the remaining campers, kicking some awake in the process. They claim to be looking for the escapee from the previous night's gig, but leave the site when the media arrive. After the media leave 70-80 police move in again combing the site and tents for "weapons" before the campers decide to leave en masse.

"It was distressing to be woken by the noise of machine gun fire being broadcast in the early hours of the morning [this was later passed off by police as 'engine trouble']. Then on the final morning of the protest we were roughly awoken by a policeman hitting us across the feet and gruffly saying 'Show us your face.' They claimed to be looking for someone who'd done something the night before."

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

"We couldn't work out why the police were rummaging through the waste bins, but it came out they were looking for the street theatre props. They attached one of the tanks with masking tape to their vehicle and that night, this is when it was all over, they went up and down the camp playing machine gun and explosion noises and shining a big search light on the camp. This was after they'd shot a big flare into the camp. After AIDEX was finished they kept up the harassment and provocation for another 24 hours."

**MALE INTERVIEWEE I, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

"We were under a lot of stress and pressure all week and it was great to get out of the place. I remember jumping out of the car when we crossed into NSW and running up and down cheering because we'd finally left the ACT. (laughter)"

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**



# THE FALL OUT

## STOPPING AUSTECH '93 & THE ASIA PACIFIC SECURITY DEFENCE EXHIBITION (APDSE) '08

**During the protest** and in the days following the exhibition AIDEX organisers Bob Day and William Keys were insistent that AIDEX '93 would still be held in Canberra despite the ACT government having already cancelled their NATEX booking. Citing the estimated \$300 000 in policing costs for the '91 event Attorney General Jim Connolly emphatically stated to the media that "We won't have them." In time he was proven correct as DESIKO's plans to hold an arms fair on Federal government property at the Fairburn airbase never amounted to anything.

Finding the ACT off limits DESIKO next attempted to hold the event just across the border. On March 20 1992 the Queanbeyan Age announced that National Party State MP, Vietnam Veteran and former ASIO employee Peter Cochran had negotiated with DESIKO to hold the AUSTECH exhibition at Seiffert Oval, home of the Canberra Raiders rugby team. Despite not having been consulted about the move Queanbeyan's Mayor, Frank Pangallo, claimed that the "Council will be looking at [the proposal] with an open mind."

This attempt to hold AIDEX '93 under a new, more innocuous name soon met major opposition with letters and calls flooding into the Council's offices. Although opponents of the event did not carry out protest action DESIKO's supporters did, although all they could muster for a rally was six National Party and Liberal members. Following a series of meetings in which DESIKO talked up the technological aspects of the show the Council, led by Queanbeyan Peace Forum member Harry Hesse, passed a resolution allowing AUSTECH to go ahead so long as it only included displays for peaceful purposes.

Having had his bluff called Keys stated that the show would happen regardless of the Council's views, but within a day DESIKO announced the cancellation of the project. Despite repeatedly claiming during AIDEX '91 that they would find no problem in locating another major city to host future weapons exhibitions this did not prove the case and DESIKO was eventually forced to throw in the towel.

"The aim of the AIDEX protest wasn't necessarily to physically stop it there and then. If we could do that, then great. However it was also a lobbying tool to say to state and local governments and the companies involved that the costs of taking on an arms fair would be far greater than the benefits.

After AIDEX '91 we were able to use the success of the protest to lobby against it being held anywhere else. At first DESIKO tried to say it would still be held in Canberra, but on Federal land. We wrote letters to everyone we knew of in the arms industry, talked to them, sent messages, did whatever we could to say that if it went ahead then they were going to be held culpable. It never went ahead.

Then they said they'd hold it in Queanbeyan. There was a huge council meeting which was surrounded by cops and we hadn't even called a protest. However we did get word through to all the councilors and local business people, etc about what sort of protest they could expect if they went ahead with the event. We knew that the Mayor was Catholic so when he got sick of

all the messages and turned off his fax machine priests and nuns from all over Australia started faxing the Catholic Presbytery in Queanbeyan asking the parish priest to please deliver their messages. Which he did making him effectively the only person to turn up and protest when he arrived at the council meeting with all these archive boxes full of faxes (laughter).

Later there was a rumour it was going to be in Adelaide in the 1990s and we got it stopped there. The protest was very successful in stopping the show, but I don't believe we achieved much in hampering the arms industry itself. All we did was tell them what we thought of them, told them that we didn't want them to do their deals so publicly and openly and sent them behind closed doors and offshore. Which in itself was a worthwhile outcome."

**JACOB GRECH, Interview, August 2008**

"The protest certainly drew media attention to the issues [of the arms trade] and the amount of reaction and counter-reaction in the press was very good I think. It's also interesting to see in the literature from the people who ran AIDEX and who are involved in the arms industry that they seem to be very much on the defensive. Obviously the protests and the media have gotten to them and they feel they have to justify what they are doing... In one of these magazines one person said 'Why are we being classed as pariahs?' (laughter)."

**CAA SPOKESPERSON JEFF ATKINSON, Radio Skid Row, December 1991**

After 17 years of promotional events being held behind the façade of air shows or away from public view in hotels and military installations a new company APDS Exhibition Ltd (AEL) emerged in 2007. Announcing it was to hold the Asia Pacific Defence and Security Exhibition (APDSE) at the Adelaide Convention Centre from November 11 the following year AEL engaged a number of full time staff to promote and facilitate the event. The arms fair received a hearty endorsement as well as financial support from the ALP Rann administration who, in the midst of a collapsing manufacturing sector, had been talking up South Australia as the "Defence state" for some time.

From late 2007 peace groups began lobbying against APDSE and by the middle of 2008 coalitions in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne had begun to coalesce around the aim of planning a major protest for November. By choosing to open APDSE on the eightieth ninetieth anniversary of the ending of WW1 AEL had handed its opponents an important public relations advantage, but many on the protesters' side were unsure as to whether they would be able to muster the numbers to fully shut the fair down. Nevertheless they began producing educational and promotional material in the form of posters, websites and leaflets as well as organising benefit gigs, public meetings, transport and an Adelaide Peace Festival.

A number of key activists from AIDEX '89 and '91 chose to take part in the campaign including past and present members of RAAF, CAM, ISO, DSP, Operation Rhubarb, the Australian Nonviolence Network and the Australian Anti-Bases Coaliton. Many of the debates over appropriate protest tactics and the centralization of decision making that had arisen during AIDEX, and since, were revisited. By August 2008 however it was clear that a blockade of the Adelaide Convention Centre would take place alongside other protest activities.

With the anti-APDSE campaign gaining momentum in early September the shock announcement came that AEL would be abandoning APDSE over security con-



cerns. With the no doubt highly embarrassed South Australian Premier Mike Rann handballing the announcement to his deputy Kevin Foley it was clear that the spectre of AIDEX '91 continued to haunt the arms industry. Indeed in condemning his opponents AEL's Chief Executive Phil Guy gave a backhanded compliment to the AIDEX generation stating "Police advise that the APDS exhibition is being targeted by highly organised and violent protesters with a history of focusing on similar defence and security events."

As with the 1991 protest the demonisation of protesters immediately came to the fore with Foley claiming in the Sunday Mail on September 7 2008 that the decision was made due to expectations that "feral, low-life people that want society to be in a state of near anarchy for their own perverse pleasure" would

be descending on Adelaide. Foley particularly cited the threat of those who had taken part in the Melbourne G20 protests in 2006 which was ironic given that that protest, like AIDEX '91, had seen the violence of a minority of demonstrators hyped out of all proportion.

"As the spokesperson for the organisation planning to PEACEFULLY protest this event, I reject Kevin Foley's insults. The Stop the War Fair Coalition is a group of peaceful citizens, young and old from churches, unions and NGO's who were disgusted at the prospect of war profiteering on a day when we should be remembering the horrors of conflict. The real threat to civil society and order are arms merchants and their spineless political patrons who do their bidding. The community has been victorious in rejecting Labors grim vision for our beautiful State."

**JAKE WISHART, Online comment, Adelaide Now, September 2008**

"Does Kevin Foley appreciate the irony of cancelling an arms fair because he was afraid of potential violence? 'Oh no, we can't sell guns and bombs here, protestors might show up and get violent.' Some amazing logic at work there Kev. That famous scene from Dr Strangelove springs to mind ... 'You can't fight in here - this is the war room!' More likely he was trying to avoid the bad press of holding an arms fair on Remembrance Day."

**MICHAEL BROOKS, Online comment, Adelaide Now, September 2008**



"[Kevin Foley] got something wrong about us anarchists. We in fact want society to be in a state of total anarchy, for the perverse pleasure of all! Hahaha! But seriously I don't care what any right wing pro-war chump says, or any lefty pacifist says... WE WON and it's because the government was AFRAID! This IS power to the people."

**"IDONTPRAYITHINK", Online comment, Adelaide Now, September 2008**

"Non-violence is actually what these activists were advocating! We were saying no to SA becoming the defence state and presenting an alternative. Why not become a leader in renewable technology, healthcare systems, education systems? The activists were clearly and indisputably advocating non-violent action against the violent campaigns of the military industry. The organisers had produced clear guidelines about how this was to be achieved. For what could hurt our cause more than using violence to quell violence?"

**ELIZABETH YOUNG, Online comment, Adelaide Now, September 2008**

In spite of the predictable statements about protester behaviour it was evident from Foley's other comments that the projected costs of policing had been the determining factor in the cancellation. SAPOL's Protective Security Service command had briefed the Government's Emergency Management Committee on August 28 that they would require around 500 officers for the protest and annual leave had already been cancelled for the entire force. The role of costs was reinforced by Phil Guy who also admitted that the Commonwealth government and Department of Defence had failed to get behind the project further undermining its viability.

"Hearing that they'd cancelled APDSE was like winning the Grand Final. I was ringing others involved in the campaign with the news and people were virtually jumping with joy. It was kind of a shock because it had been a long time since the peace movement had actually won anything.

It had been interesting to see a number of people I knew from the AIDEX '91 era coming out in response to this new arms fair. There were lots of other people involved in the Melbourne campaign, but for some of us it was a bit like the Blues Brothers. 'We've got to get the band together again'.

Initially I had my doubts as to how many people we could mobilize for Adelaide as the Left was in a quiet period, there hadn't been a new war for a while and it was going to be during Uni and school exams. All the contextual ingredients that had gotten so many determined people to AIDEX didn't seem to be there this time. Also militarism had become a lot more publicly acceptable in the Howard years thanks to all the hard work Beazley and co had put in during the '80s. Obviously though arms exports and weapons dealing are still seen as beyond the pale because even though we hadn't allowed ourselves a lot of time the anti-APDSE campaign began to get some real traction in late August. Many of us were beginning to get excited about the possibilities.

From their public statements the police and the Rannbo government had obviously been monitoring our efforts. They knew that they would have to pay a lot of overtime to ensure APDSE could go ahead and that it would be inevitably messy. I think that the Commonwealth's decision not to plough time and money

into the event was less a reflection of the 'peace-loving' nature of the Rudd government and more a sign that they could see that doing this sort of thing publicly was more likely to be of harm than good for the arms industry. Rann and his buddies initially saw APDSE as an opportunity to sell SA to the world as a great place for arms dealers to invest in, but it blew up in their face and they figured it was better to get out earlier rather than later. The costs of policing once more have been proven to be greater than the profits of death.

Naturally enough the ALP will continue to push SA as the 'Defence state', but this is still an important victory because APDSE was planned as the next step in the mainstreaming of the arms industry. They wanted to pass off APDSE as the equivalent of a car show, but instead the arms trade remains their dirty little secret."

**"CHRIS", Interview, September 2008**

"The closing down of the APDSE has been a major victory for the peace and aligned movements in Australia. We have rarely seen such a bloodless coup against the arms trade. They call us violent for speaking of a blockade against an arms fair. They call us extremist low-lives, as dangerous to society, simply because we have an expectation of peace and think of security as a more complex concept than military might. It is their violence that is the problem and their undoing. What could be lower in life than those who seek to profiteer from war and conflict? We did little more than expose their dealings and creatively engage the community to stand up against them.

The fact that they set the date for the protest as 11 November, on the 90th anniversary of Armistice/Remembrance Day, was always an offence and possibly their first key mistake. Remembrance Day is almost sacred to many Australians, a day to remember the dead and to reflect on what was hoped to be the end of the 'war to end all wars.' Unfortunately, the 20th century failed to fulfill that wish, so many of us in the peace community see 11 November as a day to reflect on all lives lost to war and conflict in the past 90 years. Choosing that day out of all others to open an arms fair was an insult and a critical mistake for the organizers.

Their other key mistake was thinking they could come out blatantly and sell their wares, hoping that the people of Australia wouldn't find this abhorrent. We showed in 1991 that we wouldn't stand for it, and we won't stand for it now.

So the organisers of this arms fair had two major lapses of judgement. Both involved a belief that Australians would forget. And we showed them that the slogan is 'Lest we forget' not 'Let's we forget.'

We know full well that this business is going on day to day in this country and in others all around the world. In fact the organisers of the arms fair boasted that, 'More than \$14 billion worth of new defence and security projects are coming online, providing significant opportunities for businesses' on their website. The Acting SA Premier Mr Foley said the decision to close the exhibition couldn't be seen as a victory by peace groups because 'the contacts with manufacturers made so far would be followed up.'

We know full well that closing one major international arms fair every 17 years may not stop the industry. But it does send a clear message again that

we will not tolerate their business dealings being done in the open, promoting this industry as legitimate. It is an industry built on fear and mistrust, an industry that stifles diplomacy and dialogue. Although the profits for the companies might be large, the cost is far too high for the people of our region.

So the APDSE arms fair closing before it even opened is a victory for the peace movement, a victory for those who believe that war should not be glorified or made into a business. It is a victory that we will hold up and promote for a long time to come.”

**“DELILAH”, Interview, September 2008**

“In July 2007 Reed Elsevier, the organisers of the DSEi arms fair in London bowed to public pressure and sold off its exhibition arm. While another company has since purchased the rights to DSEi and it will go ahead, this was the first victory against arms shows since the AIDEX '93 show was cancelled in Canberra.

Though I hadn't worked directly on arms trade issues for some time, I've been keeping a watching brief reading the industry journals and rss feeds for years. Many arms trade activists were looking for the DSEi replacement and on Spring Equinox last year an article appeared in the Adelaide Advertiser confirming that the Asia Pacific Defence & Security Exhibition would open on Remembrance Day 2008. The spokesperson quoted was the man behind the DSEi fairs and the article was quickly followed by ads and notifications in industry journals and websites which showed that while the parent company, Reed Elsevier had pulled out of arms fairs, the individuals involved had simply sought to try their luck in the colonies like so many had before.

There had not been an arms fair in Australia since 1991 and the arms trade had quietly slipped off the movement's radar as more pressing issues demanded our attention. The organisers' careless faux pas in not recognising the significance of 11 November as much as anything got people's ire and indignation up.

The next few months were spent quietly writing to small to medium sized defence contractors in Australia, compiling what information we could on the current state of Australia's role in the arms trade and putting the word around to the major organisations and key activists in other cities.

In keeping with the use of 'dates of significance', OzPeace held the Melbourne launch of the campaign on Valentine's Day 2008 under the slogan 'Make Love Not War' and held a second stage launch on Winter Solstice under the banner of 'The Long Dark Night of the Arms Trade'.

By Winter Solstice, groups had commenced co-ordinating around the country, the OzPeace apdsexhibition.org website was up and running and we were starting to get news from people around the country who wanted to become a part of the campaign.

A meeting in Adelaide in July brought together many different streams of the activist community; total non-violent direct action pacifists, angry young anarchists, environmentalists, hard line communists, doctors, feminists, church folk and everything in between. Over the next couple of months this was to prove to be a sometimes frustrating dialogue as the debate over what were and what were not, appropriate forms of protest.

The South Australia police in the end pretty much admitted that they had monitoring our campaign and that they had also received information from interstate. In the end, I believe it was precisely our divergence of thought which led to the cancellation of the arms fair with the security forces (and probably private investigators working for the corporations) unable to make heads or tails of our common understandings, plans and tactics anymore than most of us could!

When the announcement of the show's cancellation was made in the Advertiser on Fathers' Day this year, the Acting Premier of SA, Kev Foley's response spoke a great deal. To start with his claim that 'violent low life ferals... were going to descend on Adelaide ...who enjoyed disrupting civil society for their own perverse pleasure' put me in mind of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction as the arms dealing community going about its scaremongering tactics to seek sales and support. A later reading between the lines though showed that they had no idea what to expect and seemed devoid of any real information.

There were (and are) many critics of the campaign, even within it, who saw the kind of tactics, dialogue and disparity of approach as unorganised and a weakness. I would call it very organised in the truest sense of the term, every part using its strengths and weaknesses together to form an anarchic organic whole which none of us could control and manipulate internally and no one could correctly analyse and interpret externally.

The tactics which won this campaign were based in our diversity as a movement: our movement, which like any ecosystem or community can not flourish as a monoculture but relies on struggle and debate and cross pollination.

It is precisely these things that the Masters of War seek to destroy: diversity, struggle, debate, organic anarchy as they attempt to impose a sameness of thought, economy, style and politic that amount to an unnatural monoculture that they could never utterly impose on a natural world.

Which is why in the long term, they are destined to always lose."

**JACOB GRECH, Interview, September 2008**

## **DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY (DSS) HARASSMENT OF PROTESTERS**

Just days after the end of the AIDEX '91 protest Sydney's Telegraph Mirror ran a story, entitled "Tony Protests On The Taxpayer's Dollar", about a dole bludging troublemaker who had taken part in the AIDEX '91 protest. The tale of the mysterious "Tony" soon caught the attention of the Secretary of the Department of Social Security (DSS), Derek Volker. Concerned that others like "Tony" could be out there roting the public purse Volker's office contacted the AFP to request details relating to the 238 individuals arrested during the protest. While it was later claimed that senior AFP officers had vetoed the request (in an unsigned fax and a letter that was later "lost") junior officers nevertheless handed over the information on two occasions.



"Professional protesters?" AIDEX '91 (Leo Bild)



Wednesday march, AIDEX '91 (Leo Bild)

Having received the list on December 20 the DSS found that 51 of the 238 protesters were receiving benefits and in January 1992 began conducting investigations into 39 cases. A memo from a DSS regional manager was later leaked to the Queensland Stop AIDEX Campaign. Other than providing a list of names taken by the police during the AIDEX protest it stated "The Secretary has requested that each of these cases be reviewed to test entitlement as a complaint has been lodged that some DSS clients are 'professional' protesters who actively participate in regular demonstrations." Interviews were held at individuals houses and DSS offices and a number of people were forced to provide written statements justifying their presence in Canberra.

"[This is] clearly a breach of privacy and punishment of dissent which harks back to the era of Cold War hysteria against those who disagree. Where does it say in the DSS Act that clients are not allowed to express their opinions?"

**BRENDAN GREENHILL, Green Left Weekly, 26 February 1992**

"The swapping of government records for improper purposes has implications which go beyond the Department of Social Security and the Federal Police ... Any person who arouses the ire of one arm of government could be the subject of harassment by another department, if bureaucrats come to regard this kind of behaviour as acceptable."

**AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS SENATOR KARIN SOWADA, Green Left Weekly, 26 February 1992**

When word first got out in January and February about the investigations activists around the country swung into action contacting the media and complaining to a variety of government bodies. Despite receiving verbal legal advice as early as January 20, and then written advice in February, that the list had been provided improperly the DSS continued its operation. Four people, two of whom were later reinstated, eventually had their benefits cut off. As late as February 20 Richard Moore, a representative of Social Security minister Neal Blewett's office, stated that to be removed or detained at a political demonstration was enough to justify a review of an individual's benefits.

The Human Rights Commission privacy commissioner Kevin O'Connor however did not agree. In a July 1992 report to Parliament he reprimanded both the AFP and DSS for their actions ruling that going after a group of people on the basis of "generalised accusations" that they were "professional protesters" was not only unlawful, but also a breach of privacy and the civil right to free expression. Given that almost all of those on the list of arrestees had been let free or found innocent he stated that only information relating to "Tony" should have been released as he had been the only one identified anywhere as a possible fraudster. O'Connor recommended a tightening up of regulations relating to the passing of information between government bodies and noted that if privacy protections were not put in place then "a situation could be reached... with obvious chilling effects on several of the fundamental freedoms."



## COURT CASES

Most of the arrests that occurred during the AIDEX '91 protest were for petty offenses such as obstructing traffic, hindering police and resisting arrest. The majority of these charges were quickly dropped as they had been used to remove people from the area rather than in response to serious criminal offenses. No one was arrested for assaulting police with weapons and of the few assault charges laid most involved nothing more than police receiving grazes.

“Myself and another RAAF person attended all the court cases in Canberra to provide support for the people who’d either been charged during the protest or who were taking legal action against the police. We also hoped to provide continuity between the cases based on what happened in each. It was a very hard, bitter and sad experience because the police lied significantly and consistently in an ongoing way and the judges and magistrates collaborated in that. They reacted very harshly to any suggestion that the police were being misleading in any way, even when presented with footage clearly to the contrary. What the police were saying and getting away was almost unbelievable, but the staged incredulity of the courts in response to assertions that the police were lying just made it all the more depressing.

In the months before the cases came up, and later on with complaints to the Ombudsman, the police wore a lot of people down by visiting them over and over to pressure them into dropping their cases. Other times they did deals where they dropped charges against people in return for them withdrawing allegations. A lot of those involved just wanted it all to be over. We also didn’t have the resources or legal support to fight these cases effectively.”

**FLICK RUBY, Interview, September 2008**

The most high profile post-AIDEX court case involved Sean Kenan who was one of the only protesters to be charged with a serious offense. Despite Kenan being initially denied legal aid on the basis that he was not in danger of “loss of livelihood” the police failed to prove even one of the key elements of their case when it finally reached court on March 19, 1993.

Acquitted of charges of assaulting police Kenan, a Canberra youth worker, in turn accused the police of targeting him during the protest. He claimed that he had been bashed unconscious and tortured in custody and that protesters attempting to locate him were given false information as to his whereabouts. During a long campaign following the assault Kenan saw his complaint to the ACT Ombudsman overturned, along with many others, due to a lack of independent witnesses and difficulties in identifying his assailants.

Bob Berghout employed a novel defence when his case came up in February 1992 while Queensland Catholic Worker Jim Dowling was the only AIDEX protester to serve jail time for his efforts.

“Bob’s [case] was brought to a happy conclusion two weeks ago when his charge of hindering police in the execution of their duty was dismissed in the ACT Magistrates Court. Bob’s was the first contested case arising out of AIDEX and, hopefully, will set a useful precedent. His defence was based on



the Federal Police Act, which lists the prevention of injury or death and the prevention of damage to property as among the duties of police.

He used Hansard to document the sale of ammunition by AIDEX exhibitors to Indonesia and pointed to the use of ammunition (albeit not necessarily Australian) at the Dili massacre two weeks before AIDEX. He argued that his action to hinder arms sales complemented, rather than hindered, the duties of police as defined in the act.

Magistrate Ward found Bob guilty of making it harder for police to meet their specific duty of keeping the road open, but noted the higher issues involved, considered Bob to have acted out of pure motives and dismissed the charge without recording a conviction."

**Unknown, 'News', Newcastle Peace Forum, April 1992.**

"In November 1991 six of us from the Brisbane Catholic Worker community traveled to Canberra. Our aim was to join hundreds of others non-violently resisting the AIDEX arms bazaar. The weekend turned out to be possibly the most successful action in which we have ever been involved. Not only was the military expo impeded dramatically, but the action ensured the intended biennial event would not happen again.

Personally I was arrested a number of times and subjected to continual police violence. I can happily say I did not retaliate in any way despite being punched, kicked, choked, dragged across the bitumen, and having my head pushed into a rubbish bin, and my arm twisted up my back until I screamed. I sustained a knee injury which lasted for over three months, but compared to some who suffered broken limbs or damaged backs I was lucky.

A year and a half later I was arrested and sent to Brisbane's Boggo Road jail to serve ten days for refusing to pay my fines associated with weekend's arrests. I can safely say the ten days did not affect me too badly as I had forgotten all about it until I pulled out my dusty AIDEX file and read the Green Left Weekly cutting about my jailing.

I would like to encourage more resistance with a few words of advice, 'Keep smiling. Stay non-violent and all will (probably) be well.'"

**JIM DOWLING, Interview, September 2008**

## **COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE TO THE ACT OMBUDSMAN**

With the mainstream media ignoring their plight one of the few avenues that the protesters had to left to protest their treatment at the hands of the police was to lodge complaints with the AFP and ACT Ombudsman. During the protest the legal tent set up in the camp assisted injured protesters with filling out Statutory Declarations and had two Justices of the Peace on site to witness them. In the months following AIDEX '91 groups such as the Sydney Anti-Bases Coalition and Melbourne's Campaign Against Militarism helped collect further statements. In all 169 people lodged a total of 410 complaints. 114 of them alone were lodged via the office of Senator Sid Spindler, who along with other Australian Democrats had criticised police behaviour during the protest.



Where were their badges? (Susan Luckman)



Yet another violent arrest at AIDEX '91 (Susan Luckman)

The ACT Ombudsman Philippa Smith's office was swamped by the sheer number of complaints and failed to respond in a timely manner. The slowness of her office's investigations was a problem that Smith later admitted led to a number of cases being dropped when complainants were unable to be located. A much larger flaw in the process however stemmed from the fact that one section of the AFP, the Internal Investigations Division (IID), was being used by the Ombudsman to investigate another. Many complainants reported encountering an aggressive attitude from the eight officers employed to investigate their claims with questioning often relating to matters outside of the original complaint. In her final report Smith criticized the IID for its poor quality of investigation in regards to fellow officers and hostile questioning of complainants. In response to these lapses she called for the installation of a complaints management system within the IID to deal with IID officers themselves.

"At times I was concerned by the lack of objectivity evident in some [IID] reports. My office's analysis of IID reports revealed that on a number of occasions investigators resorted to the use of pejorative language and demonstrated a lack of objectivity when discussing or describing the actions of some people at the AIDEX demonstrations.

On occasions investigators appeared to be reluctant to take a rigorous approach when interviewing AFP members. This was illustrated at times, by the failure to draw conclusions or follow up conflicting statements by members. Ambiguous or non committal answers by AFP members were sometimes left unchallenged when further questioning would have been appropriate."

**OFFICE OF THE COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN, Report of Investigations Into Complaints Arising From the Demonstrations Held at AIDEX: November 1991, 24 December 1993**

"The so called objective Federal Police came around to interview me and ask questions about the statutory declaration. I was particularly dissatisfied with this... First of all they said they would have to photograph me. 'Did I mind?' and I said 'Yes I do.' I said 'I am not charged with anything. I have not committed any crime. I am prepared to discuss this. I don't have a lot of faith in the outcome, but I will go that far, but no I refuse to be photographed.'

They went and visited everyone. I wasn't prepared to have it at my house, I have children and I didn't want to expose children to this. I tried to talk about what I have said. I said I saw a policeman do this, this and this. But they were more interested in discussing who did I know in the crowd and how many people did I know.... When I made it clear that I wasn't prepared to discuss that, [then] that was the end of that particular interview.

Some time later I got a letter to say that they were re-interviewing people so I rang a Canberra number and said I wasn't interested in proceeding with it. The next minute the same two police officers turned up on the doorstep saying they wanted to discuss this, this and this with me. I said that I have already said that I don't wish to continue with this, I know what my rights are and they finally left.

I don't know that I would bother going through that Statutory Declaration

procedure again. If I had known that the Federal Police can actually investigate themselves and are not accountable to any outside authority, I mean what's the point?"

**INTERVIEWEE A, Piecing It Together: Hearing The Stories of AIDEX '91, Penniless Productions, 1995**

"It is difficult I think for anyone to have faith in a police officer's actions being investigated by more police officers. I think myself, I felt that I could make a complaint and I didn't have to worry about it.... I am clean, simply because of that I can feel relatively relaxed about making a complaint, which people who are in debt or on social security or who have had bad dealings with the police or reason to expect that they might be victimised by police, can't do...

Now even though they had video footage and I could identify the officer, all these people who I saw being really severely bashed, no-one was there videotaping that. They did not have their numbers on, they took their numbers off after the first couple of days. There was no way you could have identified those people, everything happened so fast.

Now I think my complaint stuck around longer than anybody else's that I know because I had a number and because I stuck around and was contactable. But even though they had a videotape of that guy doing exactly what I said, although not to me, they say you can't really make out the faces of the protesters.

When the police came to talk to me about the claim I had made, they proceeded with great suspicion. Although I was the one who made the complaint they made me feel as if I was on trial. There were two of them and one of me; it was only by good chance that I had invited my house mates to stick around. They asked me all sorts of irrelevant questions, such as what were the organizational affiliations of people who traveled on the bus with me. Why is this relevant to whether this officer hit me and whether he had the right to?

My complaint was found to be unsubstantiated...There were lots of people there when I was hit, but I didn't have the foresight to say, 'Look I don't know you very well, can I have your address and phone number?' That is unfortunately what often happens. I am middle class and tertiary educated and if I can't get my complaint listed, what hope is there for anyone else?"

**INTERVIEWEE B, Piecing It Together: Hearing The Stories of AIDEX '91, Penniless Productions, 1995**

When the Ombudsman's report was finally handed down in September 1993 only eight claims against the police were found to have been substantiated. A further 78 complaints were found to be unsubstantiated, 157 were incapable of determination and 84 were not investigated due to the difficulty of locating complainants or because someone more directly involved had complained. Six cases were also withdrawn by the complainant.

Behind these statistics, which seemed to vindicate police claims that they had acted lawfully, was the fact that the majority of cases were unable to proceed because of the difficulty of identifying individual officers. Smith criticized the practice of police removing their ID badges along with that of many officers refusing to give their name and identification number when asked. Further

findings identified up to 13 occasions in which video records of arrestees being charged were not made further undermining the IID's ability to investigate claims. In one case Smith declared that this "omission was particularly disturbing as the complainant alleged that he had been assaulted by AFP members and was unconscious prior to being placed in the cell."

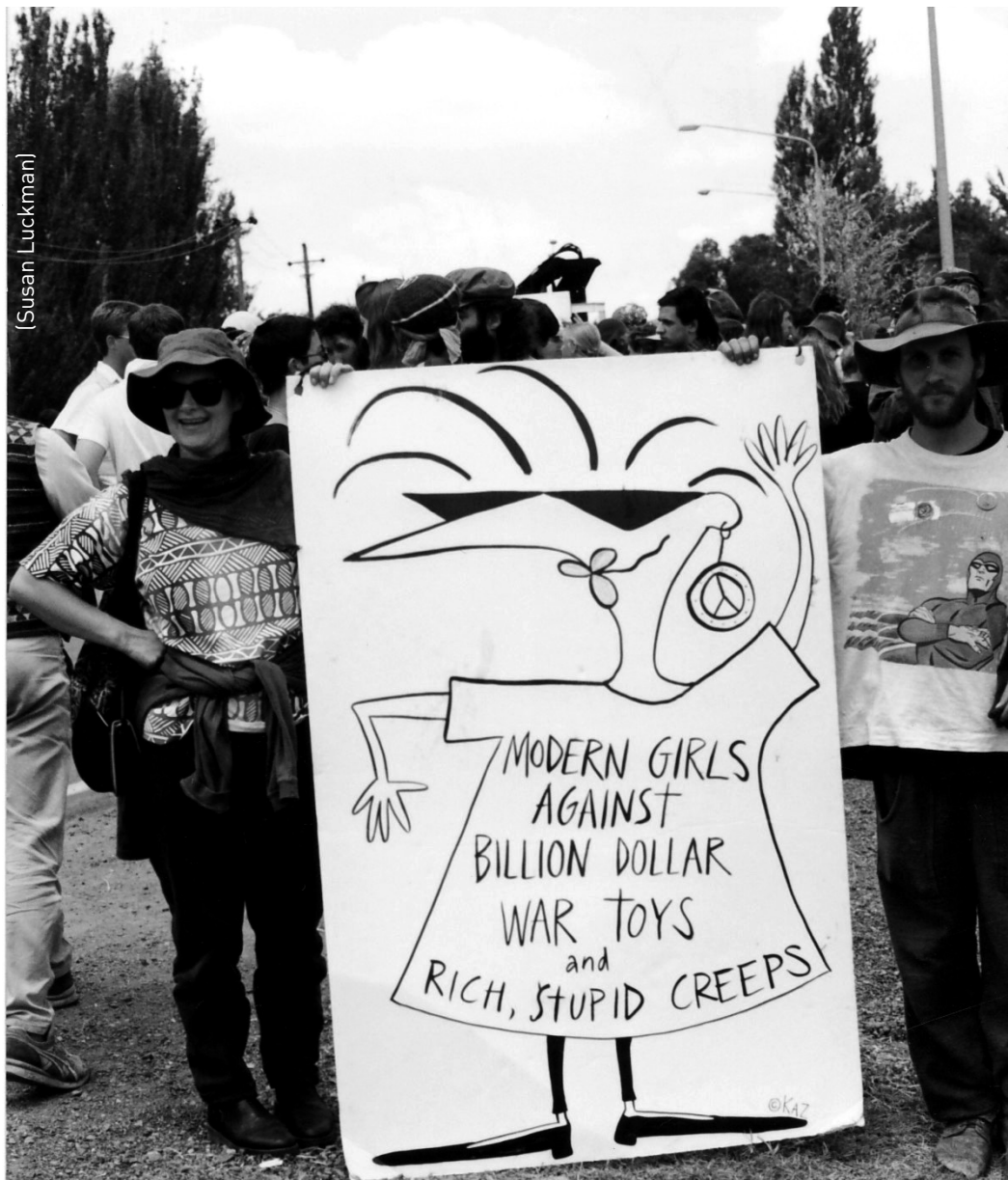
The Ombudsman's report also noted that the burden of proof in AFP disciplinary hearings was of a criminal standard and that with little footage of police actions and the problems with identification it was difficult to prove "beyond reasonable doubt" that protesters had received the treatment they claimed. Smith admitted that the application of criminal standards "may have resulted in a higher level of 'incapable of determination' outcomes than if civil standard of proof (balance of probabilities) was applied."

Having stated that "It would be too simplistic an approach to consider the complaints solely on the basis of the outcomes of the individual complaints" the Ombudsman's opinion of the police operation was scathing. So harsh were her criticisms that the AFP's Chief Commissioner Ronald McAulay complained to the Australia Police Journal that "someone in the future will refer back to [it] and use it as an example of police brutality." Smith certainly cited numerous examples of such brutality including officers engaging in hair pulling and kneeling as well as throwing and dragging protesters by their arms. The use of dangerous pain compliance holds was also criticized as "indiscriminate and in any event, unnecessary" as was the inappropriate and, in some cases, unlawful employment of police batons and dogs.

The Ombudsman's report further found that police planning had been inadequate with operations often poorly supervised resulting in a breakdown in control and command. Revelations included the confirmation that approximately 50 AFP members were drafted in for long shifts despite having limited or no experience and training in crowd control. Smith also confirmed that arrestees were not delivered food at the Woden and Belconnen watch-houses for up to seven hours.

Other than identifying flaws in her office's investigation process and criticising the behaviour of police during the AIDEX protest Smith also made a number of recommendations. These included police wearing embroidered identity tags, so as to avoid the excuse that their badges needed to be removed for safety reasons, and changes to ensure the continuous video monitoring of charging procedures in watch-houses. The Ombudsman also called for a series of reviews into AFP Standing Operational Procedures regarding demonstrations, the use of pain compliance holds and the use of common law powers regarding breach of the peace.

Outside of the alternative media and journals covering the police and legal fraternity Smith's report received little coverage. In the end the Ombudsman wielded little more than the power to review matters and few of her recommendations were ever implemented.



# PERSONAL REFLECTIONS: THE EFFECT OF AIDEX '91 ON INDIVIDUALS AND THE LEFT



"The protest broadened the scope of the peace movement in Australia from one which opposed war and saw weapons as wrong to looking more at who the 'Masters of War' were, analysis of the profit motive in war and pinpointing and exposing the individuals within Australian government and industry who were responsible for the increase in Australian militarism.

Secondly it brought together all the different aspects of Australia's radical scene and counterculture who hadn't collaborated much in the previous decade or so in joint actions and created a dialogue between the different groups. It was one of the various things around the world that started the dialogue about globalisation and corporatisation. There are also a number of activists who are still active around the world who came to AIDEX and were changed forever. It was a watershed for a number of young activists."

**JACOB GRECH, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

"The effect of the protest on Melbourne activists was profound. AIDEX saw two victories- one in that it stopped further arms fairs from happening, the other in that it radicalised a generation of activists. After AIDEX it became easier to mobilise people. This was a generation who had been forged in the fire, who had experienced blockading and direct action and who became more willing to stand up to the police.

People lost all respect for the police processes (given they'd not honoured them, for example by wearing their identity badges), and had a model of experience to bring to other rallies. They charged us with horses at the George Bush demo and broke people's arms, but many of us were galvanised and more psychologically prepared for such violence; at least I know I was less naïve.

There were also a number of protests around the fact that the government wanted to extend the HECS repayment model to Austudy. Many of these were organised at very short notice and we stopped applying for permits or formally asking for police permission. We managed to get so many people week in, week out that we could just roll out of Melbourne Uni and down to RMIT and fill up the streets. We'd lost respect for the legal niceties and knew that if we had the numbers there was nothing the police could do about it. One of those protests culminated in people freeing arrestees from a police van as well as charging up Parliament steps. That series of rallies were very much part of the legacy of AIDEX in that we were willing to take it up to the police. Not necessarily in a violent way, but in a refusal to be dictated to by them as to how and where we would protest."

**SUSAN LUCKMAN, Interview, August 2008**

"I think it really challenged the people going into AIDEX, whether that had any long term effect I don't know. It really empowered a lot of people who were there as protesters because you really got to see the best of people and a lot of the younger people would have drawn on that and continued to be politically active."

**JULES MCLELLAN, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

"Two years of lobbying had completely failed to shift the Labor government from its support for AIDEX. To believe that lobbying alone could achieve success is to treat Australian militarism as an irrational policy that the



government could easily abandon (once it was given the right argument) rather than as something built in to the drive of the Australian ruling class to assert influence in its regional 'backyard.'

The AIDEX protest was a recognition of the need to move beyond lobbying if AIDEX was to be shut down. The blockade was an attempt by ordinary women and men to oppose the mass violence of modern militarism and was met with the mass violence of the state's police. Here was the real violence, not the efforts of protesters to protect one another, to compare protester's 'verbal violence' with the physical brutality dished out by the police is double-speak of the highest order...

None of this is to argue that there aren't issues to critically discuss about AIDEX: how do we best fight sexism in a peace camp; how do we build a mass action that can involve people who are not able to be involved in confrontationist actions? But we can't begin to discuss these things if people contributing to the debate are still at the stage of simply reworking the media's myths...

The women and men protesting at AIDEX snatched effective political action from the jaws of tokenism. Their mass blockade and determination to protect the blockade from police violence scored a small, but significant victory against arms bazaars and the rotten system that creates them. Some of us felt the effect of that victory, a mood of resistance, at the Melbourne demonstrations against George Bush..."

**DAVID POPE (ISO), Letter, Green Left Weekly, 1 April 1992**

"Looking back it was terrible how I ignored my affinity group for so much of the protest. I had lots of friends there from all over so would often hang with small groups of others or float around. In retrospect I ignored a core source of support. It was many years later when I realized how important activist support and safety structures and processes like this are and put effort into building them (through Pt'chang and trainings etc)

It was over 12 months after AIDEX that we managed to organise some sort of debriefing for us as an affinity group. Someone got it together after realizing how stressed and impacted we all still were. Glen Ochre (Commonground) facilitated it for us. I remember how surprised I was by the intensity of emotions at that debriefing. I/ we were crying and revisiting those intense emotions.

Again it was a lesson in how vital good activist debriefing is after something like that and something that I've put into practice ever since.

In many ways, most, if not all of the activist projects I've been involved with since AIDEX- such as activist training, activist safety structures with Pt'chang, the Legal Observer Teams at S11, organising and running activist debriefings and the Activist Rights website have been strongly influenced by my experiences there."

**ANTHONY KELLY, Interview, August 2008**

"Seeing so many bad arrests was helpful in making me decide that head to head confrontation is not the way to go. There was a big debate at AIDEX between the nonviolence people and the more confrontational ones. That was good and needs to happen time to time, you need all the currents flowing to

change society. However for me the violence that people endured helped push me more towards cultural and musical interventions in the protest scene. The state has a corner on the violence market and does it really heavy and hard. I think that the most effective weapons that we have are joy, culture and humour.”

**JOHN JACOBS, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

“As a young and fairly naïve activist, AIDEX ’91 and all the other things that happened that year were a watershed for me in understanding Australia’s place as a force in the Asia-Pacific region. A lot of that is taken for granted now, but it wasn’t so clear or talked about then. The fact that the Dili massacre had just happened and that the people who were involved in it would be coming to AIDEX to do their shopping brought together an understanding of the wider picture.

I think the diverse and collaborative approach of the AIDEX ’91 protest has been taken to new heights in the years since with S11, Jabiluka and other campaigns. There is a widespread acceptance now that you can have lots of different groups doing different things within the same protest and that you can coordinate it all without having to have control. Like those campaigns AIDEX was a flag-ship event that pulled in a new generation of people, but also burnt out others.

I think what makes me saddest is that whilst we stopped them from having major events out in public for 17 years we were unable to turn the success of AIDEX ’91 into an ongoing and substantive campaign. The next year I was part of the protest against the Aerospace show at Avalon where they quietly conducted arms sales behind the cloak of a public air show. The numbers at that protest were quite small and we weren’t able to have much effect. Since that time there have been all sorts of small arms conferences and get togethers held out of public view.

Whilst the knowledge of the links of the arms trade to other issues is more widespread now than it was back then, there hasn’t been that cohesive focus to keep a campaign rolling on. We’re scrambling to bring together the knowledge we had back then in order to apply it to today because the broader campaign didn’t last beyond a few years.”

**“DELILAH”, Interview, August 2008**

“The effect of a national protest event like AIDEX needs to be carefully evaluated. Afterward many of us were on the verge of burn-out. Was it worth the energy? How should we do things differently in the future? Certainly I would go in advance to carry out reconnaissance and I would be totally self-sufficient in media communication, transport and basic maintenance.

How did AIDEX fit into our long term anti-militarist strategy? How would we organise a national event that did fit into our long term strategy? We certainly arrived at AIDEX determined ‘to do our own thing.’ How does an affinity group maintain its independence? One answer to this, I think, lies with a commitment to process. From the beginning we used bad process. These are some questions that I hope will be part of ongoing discussion.”

**MARGARET PESTORIUS, ‘An AIDEX Experience’, Nonviolence Today #25, Mar/April 1992**



Benny Zable helps block the Man Gate, AIDEX' 91 (Leo Bild)

"The AIDEX protest succeeded because it showed that there was an enormous amount of political capital to be lost when governments tried to hold these kind of arms fairs in this country. The public, open, celebratory arms sales events haven't happened in Australia for 17 years. However we know that they've shifted a lot of these meetings to countries where human rights abuses are high and democracy is low or have held them deep within military installations.

We succeeded on a public information level, but we haven't stopped the arms trade. In the post-Cold War moment we captured and extended the sentiment towards peace, but in the years after AIDEX we lost it. There hasn't been a constant monitoring of the arms trade and a sustained focus on opposing militarism in Australia.

A few years after AIDEX there was a huge upswing of anti-nuclear feeling in this country around French nuclear testing in the Pacific. That proved that the work people had done on that issue in earlier times had left enough bones to quickly grow flesh when the right trigger arrived. I'm not sure we could say the same thing for sentiment against arms trading and militarism itself. Unlike overseas where issues like land mines and small arms have generated a real grassroots response the impetus has faded here and we're having to rebuild it.

Some people have talked up what a devastating effect AIDEX had and how it damaged the Left. In some respects that may have been true because it put people face to face with the realities of what happens when protests are successful. There were prices to be paid for what we did. A sign of how successful we were was how much they beat us up and tragically some people

sustained permanent damage to their bodies.

I was part of organising debriefings, almost therapy groups, for people in Melbourne and Canberra after the protest. Those were important, but they also became a forum for some of the NVDA people to say that the whole protest was a failure which to my mind was the wrong analysis... The experience of AIDEX was shattering for many in the NVDA scene. Their illusions about being able to de-role the police collapsed. Those of us who had criticized their approach had long said that it wouldn't work in all situations and AIDEX showed that it didn't."

**FLICK RUBY, Interview, September 2008**

"This is a long piece of work we are engaged in. Patriarchy, capitalism, violence in all its manifestations will not be quickly overcome. And that means we cannot afford to allow ourselves and each other to burn out physically, to wear down through overwork or to reach such depths of despair that we give up. We need to make sure we don't ever face violence like that at AIDEX again without somewhere to take our fear, anger, sadness and despair. I want to be on the picket lines as an old woman if that's still necessary, and I'm committed to building a movement that will make that possible."

**MARY HEATH, 'Protest Opposing AIDEX 1991', Unpublished, 1991**

"The big thing for me was that we did stop it. After Hawke and Keating the Left had had so many losses. This wasn't a pyrrhic victory, but it actually stopped the event for 17 years because they knew that they were going to be driven nuts. Other things like the MUA dispute, you sort of won, you sort of lost, but this was a straight up victory, no two ways about it.

For me and others AIDEX, and other events like the George Bush demo, cemented our ideas around the questions of power and confronting the police and things like- they say this, but we do that. It also helped me realise the strength of collective action because if there wasn't a collective there and if people weren't trying to do similar things and work together then it wouldn't have happened. I think I was fortunate in having that experience- seeing the foundations of collective power and seeing that it could win because so often we take 'We didn't lose too badly' as a victory...

It was a real apex for a lot of people at that time. I think it was also the last gasp of that creative element of the 1970s. I think the Left tried to hang on to it in so many ways and AIDEX and the George Bush demo was the end of it... There was a lot less liberalism then and that radical tradition was a lot more alive and vibrant. It does exist now, but in those experiences I had then it was a lot more articulated and vibrant and nearly every person there was engaged in it in some way. It was one of the last gasps of that 70s resistance and then Kennett came through and cut it in the nub. We're now in this process of asking 'Where is that tradition still alive, how do you reinvent it, where does it come from?'"

**COLM MCNAUGHTON, Radio 3CR, December 2007**

"AIDEX '91 was violent and this I deeply regret. But to me there is no doubt where the primary violence lay. It was with Sir William Keys and his merchants of death. The violence of British Aerospace and Honeywell left the others for

dead - which is quite an apt phrase when you come to think of it.

I see for the concerned Christian three possibilities in a situation like this:

- One is to go along with everything that goes on there and to be identified with the concern and the anger about people making money by the killing of people.

- Another is to have nothing to do with such a protest. This was the choice of the established churches who held a sunrise service some five or so kilometres from the scene.

- The third option is to be there and to do one's own thing – to be in it, but on one's own terms, even though it is open to misinterpretation and misunderstanding by those outside.

It was this third option that we chose, and at this point of time I have no regrets. I would do it again tomorrow — but with a little more boldness and a little more commitment."

**NEVILLE WATSON, 'Picket Line Prayer', Nonviolence Today #24, January/February 1992, p5**

"For me the protest was a huge success and I wear my involvement as a badge of honour. We went down there and put up with all this shit for a week and came away with a win. We were such a pain in the arse for the government and organizers, which is all we can do from such a low base, that they didn't dare hold another one.

There were some mainstream peace people who unfortunately accepted the media line and believed that all the blockaders were filthy and dirty and violent. That was disappointing and they should've known better. I don't think that anyone who wasn't there had the right to be critical because it was just so full on.

Despite all the problems with the organisation of the protest the fact remains that the arms industry hasn't dared do anything like this again for many years. They've gone on to sell arms at air shows and behind closed doors, but they had to think of creative ways to not be so obvious. It stopped them from making the arms industry a mainstream, normal thing to be embraced and celebrated in public. That in itself was a huge victory.

Even though people gained a lot of experience, in a painful way, and felt they'd done something remarkable, neither AIDEX nor any of the big protests or events since has been able to generate a well resourced and established peace lobby. There is nowhere in Australia where you'll find an office that is staffed and resourced full time to lobby for peace in the way that the environment movement does. For the most part the peace movement is made up of grumpy old men and grumpy old women doing their bit here and there when they can."

**DENNIS DOHERTY, Interview, August 2008**

"AIDEX taught me about the power of disruption and the power of having the numbers. The mainstream peace and environmental movement line at that time was that if protesters were well dressed, disciplined and well behaved they could get on the news and win over the media, the middle classes and ultimately the politicians who would in turn do the right thing because it was

the right thing and the public wanted it. Australia was basically a nice place that had sort of gone a bit wrong, but the public would ultimately support us so long as we didn't discredit ourselves by swearing and wearing funny clothes.

That kind of thinking ignored the realities of power in Australia and everywhere else and had been getting us nowhere fast for a long time. We'd had massive rallies against nukes in the 1980s, but other than getting a token Disarmament Commissioner and a few pollies mouthing platitudes at rallies we still had nuclear armed US ships coming into our ports, still had US bases helping target nuclear weapons and were still flogging uranium. I don't think that even a lot of the movement heavies fully believed in their strategies, but it was a good way of getting their followers to play by the rules and not do anything that would threaten their jobs and cosy chats with politicians.

Of course reality was far different. The war minded amongst the corporations and the policy bods and the politicians had decided that enough time had passed since the Vietnam era. They were going to build up the military and the arms industry and it was going to make them a lot of money, keep Australia on top in the Pacific and keep the Americans happy. They had the numbers amongst the elite and they didn't give a shit what the general public thought except around election time and even then they knew that with the right noises and the odd small concession to the peace movement that most of the Left would shut up and vote Labor because the Liberals were pretty much into the same stuff, only worse. Being nice was getting us nowhere in that situation.

Pretty much the only time things have changed for the better in this country is when people have taken to the streets or shut down their workplaces or done something else to cause the government and big business a lot of pain. All the gains of the 1970s in terms of the peace, union and environment movement came about because people were mobilized and threatening to make even more trouble if they didn't get what they wanted. By the 1980s that was forgotten and we paid the price.

In the 1990s we weren't able to get enough people angry enough to scare them into backing off from their push towards militarism, but in the case of AIDEX we caused enough chaos to stop another arms fair from happening. It was one of the only real wins for the peace movement in that decade and it happened because we were willing to be disruptive and difficult. More importantly there were a few thousand people willing to be disruptive and difficult. You can't do something like that with just you and your five mates, but having hundreds or thousands willing to get in the way can achieve far more than having tens of thousands willing to march around like sheep. You need to do more than just make your point, you have to truly worry them."

**"CHRIS", Interview, September 2008**

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North East Forest Alliance (NEFA)  
Pacific Area Defence Exhibition (PADEX)  
People for Nuclear Disarmament (PND)  
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